The
IMMORTAL
MOMENT

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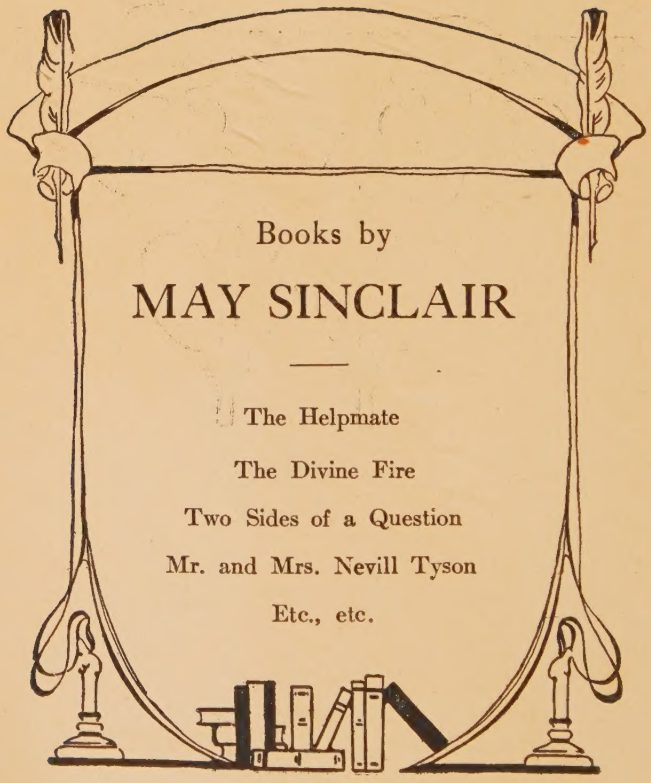
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"Kitty's face . . . . pleaded with the other face in the glass."

THE IMMORTAL MOMENT
The Story of Kitty Tailleur

By

MAY SINCLAIR

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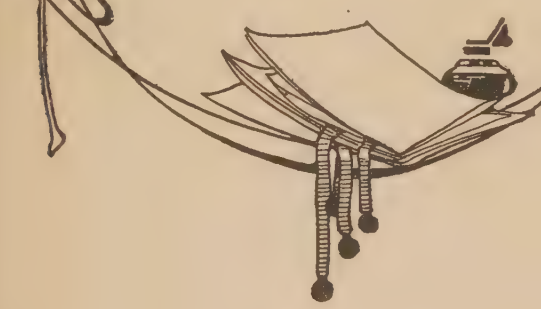

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CHAPTER I

THEY came into the hotel dining-room like young persons making their first entry into life. They carried themselves with an air of subdued audacity, of innocent inquiry. When the great doors opened to them they stood still on the threshold, charmed, expectant. There was the magic of quest, of pure, unspoiled adventure in their very efforts to catch the head-waiter's eye. It was as if they called from its fantastic dwelling-place the attendant spirit of delight.

You could never have guessed how old they were. He, at thirty-five, had preserved, by some miracle, his alert and slender adolescence. In his brown, clean-shaven face, keen with pleasure, you saw the clear,

serious eyes and the adorable smile of seventeen. She, at thirty, had kept the wide eyes and tender mouth of childhood. Her face had a child's immortal, spiritual appeal.

They were charming with each other. You might have taken them for bride and bridegroom, his absorption in her was so unimpaired. But their names in the visitors' book stood as Mr. Robert Lucy and Miss Jane Lucy. They were brother and sister. You gathered it from something absurdly alike in their faces, something profound and racial and enduring.

For they combined it all, the youth, the abandonment, the innocence, with an indomitable distinction.

They made their way with easy, unembarrassed movements, and seated themselves at a table by an open window. They bent their brows together over the menu. The head-waiter (who had flown at last to their high summons) made them his peculiar care, and they turned to him with the helpless-

ness of children. He told them what things they would like, what things (he seemed to say) would be good for them. And when he went away with their order they looked at each other and laughed, softly and instantaneously.

They had done the right thing. They both said it at the same moment, smiling triumphantly into each other's face. Southbourne was exquisite in young June, at the dawn of its season. And the Cliff Hotel promised what they wanted, a gay seclusion, a refined publicity.

If you were grossly rich, you went to the big Hôtel Métropole, opposite. If you were a person of fastidious tastes and an attenuated income, you felt the superior charm of the Cliff Hotel. The little house, the joy of its proprietor, was hidden in the privacy of its own beautiful grounds, having its back to the high road and its face to the open sea. They had taken stock of it that morning, with its clean walls, white as the

Cliff it stood on; its bay windows, its long, green-roofed veranda, looking south; its sharp, slated roofs and gables, all sheltered by the folding Downs.

They did not know which of them had first suggested Southbourne. Probably they had both thought of it at the same moment, as they were thinking now. But it was she who had voted for the Cliff Hotel, in preference to lodgings. She thought that in an hotel there would be more scope, more chance of things happening.

Jane was always on the look-out for things happening. He saw her now, with her happy eyes, and her little, tilted nose, sniffing the air, scanning the horizon.

He knew Jane and her adventures well. They were purely, pathetically vicarious. Jane was the thrall of her own sympathy. So was he. At a hint she was off, and he after her, on wild paths of inference, on perilous oceans of conjecture. Only he moved more slowly, and he knew the end

of it. He had seen, before now, her joyous leap to land, on shores of manifest disaster. He protested against that jumping to conclusions. He, for his part, took conclusions in his stride.

But Jane was always listening for a call from some foreign country of the soul. She was always entering surreptitiously into other people's feelings. They never caught her at it, never suspected her soft-footed, innocent intrusions.

She was wondering now whether they would have to make friends with any of the visitors. She hoped not, because that would spoil it, the adventure. People had a way of telling her their secrets, and Jane preferred not to be told. All she wanted was an inkling, a clue; the slenderer the better.

The guests as yet assembled were not conspicuously interesting.

There was a clergyman dining gloomily at a table by himself. There was a gray group of middle-aged ladies next to him.

There was Colonel Hankin and his wife. They had arrived with the Lucys in the hotel 'bus, and their names were entered above Robert's in the visitors' book. They marked him with manifest approval as one of themselves, and they looked all pink perfection and silver white propriety. There was the old lady who did nothing but knit. She had arrived in a fly, knitting. She was knitting now, between the courses. When she caught sight of the Lucys she smiled at them over her knitting. They had found her, before dinner, with her feet entangled in a skein of worsted. Jane had shown tenderness in disentangling her.

It was almost as if they had made friends already.

Jane's eyes roamed and lighted on a fat, wine-faced man. Lucy saw them. He teased her, challenged her. She did n't think, did she, she could do anything with him?

No. Jane thought not. He was n't interesting. There was nothing that you could

take hold of, except that he seemed to be very fond of wine, poor old thing. But then, you had to be fond of something, and perhaps it was his only weakness. What did Robert think?

Robert did not hear her. He was bending forward, looking beyond her, across the room toward the great doors. They had swung open again, with a flash of their glass panels, to give passage to a lady.

She came slowly, with the irresistible motion of creatures that divide and trouble the medium in which they move. The white, painted wainscot behind her showed her small, eager head, its waving rolls and crowning heights of hair, black as her gown. She had a sweet face, curiously foreshortened by a low forehead and the briefest of chins. It was white with the same whiteness as her neck, her shoulders, her arms — a whiteness pure and profound. This face she kept thrust a little forward, while her eyes looked round, steadily, deliberately, for the place

where she desired to be. She carried on her arm a long tippet of brown fur. It slipped, and her effort to recover it brought her to a standstill.

The large, white room, half empty at this season, gave her up bodily to what seemed to Lucy the intolerable impudence of the public gaze.

She was followed by an older lady who had the air of making her way with difficulty and vexation through an unpleasantly crowded space. This lady was somewhat oddly attired in a white dress cut high with a Puritan intention, but otherwise indiscreetly youthful. She kept close to the tail of her companion's gown, and tracked its charming evolutions with an irritated eye. Her whole aspect was evidently a protest against the publicity she was compelled to share.

Lucy was not interested in her. He was watching the lady in black who was now standing in the middle of the room. Her elbow touched the shoulder of a young man

"She stood there, strangely still . . . . before the pitiless stare that went up to her appealing face."

on her left. The fur tippet slipped again and lay at the young man's feet. He picked it up, and as he handed it to her he stared into her face, and sleeked his little moustache above a furtive, objectionable smile. His companion (Jane's uninteresting man), roused from communion with the spirit of Veuve Cliquot, fixed on the lady a pair of blood-shot eyes in a brutal, wine-dark face.

She stood there, strangely still, it seemed to Lucy, before the pitiless stare that went up, right and left, to her appealing face. She was looking, it seemed to him, for her refuge.

She moved forward. The Colonel, pinker than ever in his perfection, lowered his eyes as she approached. She paused again in her progress beside the clergyman on her right. He looked severely at her, as much as to say, "Madam, if you drop that thing in *my* neighbourhood, I shall not attempt to pick it up."

An obsequious waiter pointed out a table

next to the middle-aged ladies. She shook her head at the middle-aged ladies. She turned in her course, and her eyes met Lucy's. He said something to his sister. Jane rose and changed her seat, thus clearing the way to a table that stood beside theirs, empty, secluded in the bay of the window.

The lady in black came swiftly, as if to the place of her desire. The glance that expressed her gratitude went from Lucy to Jane and from Jane to Lucy, and rested on him for a moment.

As the four grouped themselves at their respective tables, the lady in white, seated with her back to the window, commanded a front and side view of Jane. The lady in black sat facing Lucy.

She put her elbows on the table and turned her face (her profile was remarkably pretty) to her companion.

"Well," said she, "don't you want to sit here?"

"Oh," said the older woman, "what does it matter where we sit?"

She spoke in a small, crowing voice, the voice, Lucy said to himself, of a rather terrible person. She shivered.

"Poor lamb, does it feel a draught down its little back?"

The lady rose and put her fur tippet on the shivering shoulders. They shrank from her, and she drew it closer and fastened it with caressing and cajoling fingers. There was about her something impetuous and perverse, a wilful, ungovernable tenderness. Her hands had the swiftness of things moved by sweet, disastrous impulses.

The white person (she was quite terrible) undid the fastening and shook her shoulders free of the fur. It slid to the floor for the third time.

Lucy rose from his place, picked up the fur and restored it to its owner.

The quite terrible person flushed with vexation.

"You see," said the lady, "the trouble you 've given that nice man."

"Oh don't! he 'll hear you."

"If he does, he won't mind," said the lady.

He did hear her. It was difficult not to hear, not to look at her, not to be interested in every movement that she made. Her charm, however, was powerless over her companion.

Their voices, to Lucy's relief, sank low. Then suddenly the companion spoke.

"Of course," said she, "if you *want* all the men to look at you ——"

Lucy looked no more. He heard the lady draw in her breath with a soft, sharp sound, and he felt his blood running scarlet to the roots of his hair.

"I believe" (the older lady spoke almost vindictively) "you like it."

The head-waiter, opportune in all his approaches, brought coffee at that moment. Lucy turned his chair slightly, so that he

presented his back to the speaker, and to the lady in black his side-face, shaded by his hand, conspicuously penitential.

Jane tried to set everybody at their ease by talking in a clear, cool voice about the beautiful decorations, the perfect management of the hotel. The two drank their coffee hastily and left the table. In the doorway Lucy drew the head-waiter aside.

"Who," said he, "is that lady in the window?"

"The lady in the window, sir? Miss Keating, sir."

"I mean — the other lady."

The head-waiter looked reproachfully at Lucy and apologetically at Jane.

"The lady in black, sir? You want to know her name?"

"Yes."

"Her *name*, sir, is Mrs. Tailleur."

His manner intimated respectfully that Lucy would not like Mrs. Tailleur, and that, if he did, she would not be good for him.

The brother and sister went out into the hotel garden. They strolled up and down the cool, green lawns that overhung the beach.

Lucy smoked and was silent.

"Jane," he said presently, "could *you* see what she did?"

"I was just going," said Jane, "to ask you that."

"Upon my soul, I can't see it," said he.

"Nor I," said Jane.

"Could you see what *I* did?"

"What you did?"

"Yes, I. *Did* I look at her?"

"Well, yes; certainly you looked at her."

"And you think she minded?"

"No; I don't think she minded very much."

"Come, she could n't have liked it, could she?"

"I don't know. I don't think she noticed it. You see" (Jane was off on the adventure) "she 's in mourning for her husband. He

has been dead about two years. He was n't very kind to her, and she does n't know whether to be glad or sorry he 's dead. She 's unhappy and afraid."

"I say, how do you know all that?"

"I know," said Jane, "because I see it in her face; and in her clothes. I always see things."

He laughed at that.

CHAPTER II

THEY talked a long time as they paced the green lawns, linked arm in arm, keeping their own path fastidiously.

Miss Keating, Mrs. Tailleur's companion, watched them from her seat on the veranda.

She had made her escape from the great, lighted lounge behind her where the men were sitting. She had found a corner out of sight of its wide windows. She knew that Kitty Tailleur was in there somewhere. She could hear her talking to the men. At the other end of the veranda the old lady sat with her knitting. From time to time she looked up over her needles and glanced curiously at Miss Keating.

On the lawn below, Colonel Hankin walked with his wife. They kept the same line as the Lucys, so that, in rhythmic instants, the couples made one group. There was

an affinity, a harmony in their movements as they approached each other. They were all obviously nice people, people who belonged by right to the same group, who might approach each other without any impropriety.

Miss Keating wondered how long it would be before Kitty Tailleur would approach Mr. Lucy. That afternoon, on her arrival, she had approached the Colonel, and the Colonel had got up and gone away. Kitty had then laughed. Miss Keating suspected her of a similar social intention with regard to the younger man. She knew his name. She had looked it up in the visitors' book. (She was always looking up people's names.) She had made with determination for the table next to him. Miss Keating, in the dawn of their acquaintance, had prayed that Mrs. Tailleur might not elect to sit next anybody who was not nice. Latterly she had found herself hoping that their place might not be in view of anybody who was.

For three months they had been living

in hotels, in horrifying publicity. Miss Keating dreaded most the hour they had just passed through. There was something terrible to her in their entry, in their passage down the great, white, palm-shaded, exotic room, their threading of the ways between the tables, with all the men turning round to stare at Kitty Tailleur. It was all very well for Kitty to pretend that she saved her by thus diverting and holding fast the public eye. Miss Keating felt that the tail of it flicked her unpleasantly as she followed in that troubled, luminous wake.

It had not been quite so unbearable in Brighton, at Easter, when the big hotels were crowded, and Mrs. Tailleur was not so indomitably conspicuous. Or else Miss Keating had not been so painfully alive to her. But Southbourne was half empty in early June, and the Cliff Hotel, small as it was, had room for the perfect exhibition of Mrs. Tailleur. It gave her wide, polished spaces and clean, brilliant backgrounds, yards

of parquetry for the gliding of her feet, and monstrous mirrors for reflecting her face at unexpected angles. These distances fined her grace still finer, and lent her a certain pathos, the charm of figures vanishing and remote.

Not that you could think of Kitty Tailleur as in the least remote or vanishing. She seemed to be always approaching, to hover imminently and dangerously near.

Mr. Lucy looked fairly unapproachable. His niceness, Miss Keating imagined, would keep him linked arm in arm with his sister, maintaining, unconsciously, inoffensively, his distance and distinction. He would manage better than the Colonel. He would not have to get up and go away. So Miss Keating thought.

From the lounge behind the veranda, Kitty's voice came to her again. Kitty was excited and her voice went winged. It flew upward, touched a perilous height and shook there. It hung, on its delicate, femi-

nine wings, dominating the male voices that contended, brutally, below. Now and then it found its lyric mate, a high, adolescent voice that followed it with frenzy, that broke, pitifully, in sharp, abominable laughter, like a cry of pain.

Miss Keating shut her eyes to keep out her vision of Kitty's face with the look it wore when her voice went high.

She was roused by the waiter bringing coffee. Kitty Tailleur had come out on to the veranda. She was pouring out Grace Keating's coffee, and talking to her in another voice, the one that she kept for children and for animals, and for all diminutive and helpless things. She was saying that Miss Keating (whom she called Bunny) was a dear little white rabbit, and she wanted to stroke her.

"You see, you are so very small," said Kitty, as she dropped sugar into Miss Keating's cup. She had ordered cigarettes and a liqueur for herself.

Miss Keating said nothing. She drank her coffee with a distasteful movement of her lips.

Kitty Tailleur stretched herself at full length on a garden chair. She watched her companion with eyes secretly, profoundly intent under lowered lids.

"Do you mind my smoking?" she said presently.

"No," said Miss Keating.

"Do you mind my drinking Kümmel?"

"No."

"Do you mind my showing seven inches of stocking?"

"No."

"What do you mind, then?"

"I mind your making yourself so very conspicuous."

"I don't make myself conspicuous. I was born so."

"You make me conspicuous. Goodness knows what all these people take us for!"

"Holy Innocent! As long as you sit tight and do your hair like that, nobody could

take you for anything but a dear little bunny with its ears laid back. But if you get palpitations in your little nose, and turn up your little white tail at people, and scuttle away when they look at you, you can't blame them if they wonder what 's the matter with you."

"With *me?*"

"Yes; it 's you who give the show away." Kitty smiled into her liqueur glass. "It does n't seem to strike you that your behaviour compromises me."

Miss Keating's mouth twitched. Her narrow, rather prominent front teeth lifted an instant, and then closed sharply on her lower lip. Her throat trembled as if she were swallowing some bitter thing that had been on the tip of her tongue.

"If you think that," she said, and her voice crowed no longer, "would n't it be better for us not to be together?"

Kitty shook her meditative head. "Poor Bunny," said she, "why can't you be honest?

Why don't you say plump out that you 're sick and tired of me? *I* should be. I could n't stand another woman lugging me about as I lug you."

"It is n't *that*. Only -- everywhere we go — there 's always some horrible man."

"Everywhere you go, dear lamb, there always will be."

"Yes; but one does n't have anything to do with them."

"I don't have anything to do with them."

"You talk to them."

"Of course I do," said Kitty. "Why not?"

"You don't know them."

"H'm! If you never talk to people you don't know, pray how do you get to know them?"

Kitty sat up and began playing with the matches till she held a bunch of them blazing in her hand. She was blowing out the flame as the Hankins came up the steps of the veranda. They had a smile for the

old lady in her corner, and for Miss Keating a look of wonder and curiosity and pity; but they turned from Mrs. Tailleur with guarded eyes.

"What do you bet," said Kitty, "that I don't make that long man there come and talk to me?"

"If you do ——"

"I'll do it before you count ten. One, two, three, four. I shall ask him for a light ——"

"Sh-sh! He's coming."

Kitty slid her feet to the floor and covered them with her skirt. Then she looked down, fascinated, apparently, by the shining tips of her shoes. You could have drawn a straight line from her feet to the feet of the man coming up the lawn.

"Five, six, seven." Kitty lit her last match. "T-t-t! The jamfounded thing's gone out."

The long man's sister came up the steps of the veranda. The long man followed

her slowly, with deliberate pauses in his stride.

"Eight, nine," said Kitty, under her breath. She waited.

The man's eyes had been upon her; but in the approach he lowered them, and as he passed her he turned away his head.

"It's no use," said Miss Keating; "you can't have it both ways."

Kitty was silent. Suddenly she laughed.

"Bunny," said she, "would you like to marry the long man?"

Miss Keating's mouth closed tightly, with an effort, covering her teeth.

Kitty leaned forward. "Perhaps you can if you want to. Long men sometimes go crazy about little women. And you 'd have such dear little long babies — little babies with long faces. Why not? You 're just the right size for him. He could make a memorandum of you and put you in his pocket; or you could hang on his arm like a dear little umbrella. It would be all

right. You may take it from me that man is entirely moral. He would n't think of going out without his umbrella. And he 'd be so nice when the little umbrellas came. Dear Bunny, face massage would do wonders for you. Why ever not? He 's heaps nicer than that man at the Hydro, and you 'd have married him, you know you would, if I had n't told you he was a commercial traveller. Never mind, ducky; I dare say he was n't."

Kitty curled herself up tight on the long chair and smiled dreamily at Miss Keating.

"Do you remember the way you used to talk at Matlock, just after I found you there? You *were* such a rum little thing. You said it would be very much better if we had n't any bodies, so that people could fall in love in a prettier way, and only be married spiritually. You said God ought to have arranged things on that footing. You looked so miserable when you said it. By the way, I would n't go about saying that sort of thing to people. That 's how I

spotted you. I know men think it's one of the symptoms."

"Symptoms of what?"

"Of that state of mind. When a woman comes to me and talks about being spiritual, I always know she is n't — at the moment. You asked me, Bunny — the second time I met you — if I believed in spiritual love, and all that. I did n't, and I don't. When you 're gone on a man all you want is to get him, and keep him to yourself. I dare say it feels jolly spiritual — especially, when you 're not sure of the man — but it is n't. If you 're gone on him enough to give him up when you 've got him, there might be some spirituality in *that.* I shall believe in it when I see it done."

"Seriously," she continued, "if you 'd been married, Bunny, you would n't have had half such a beastly time. You 're one of those leaning, clinging little women who require a strong, safe man to support them. You ought to be married."

Miss Keating smiled a little sad, spiritual smile, and said that was the last thing she wanted.

"Well," said Kitty, "I did n't say it was the first."

Kitty's smile was neither sad nor spiritual. She uncurled herself, got up, and stood over her companion, stroking her sleek, thin hair.

Miss Keating purred under the caress. She held up her hand to Kitty who took it and gave it a squeeze before she let it go.

"Poor Bunny. Nice Bunny," she said (as if Miss Keating were an animal). She stretched out her arms, turned, and disappeared through the lounge into the billiard-room.

CHAPTER III

IT COULD not be denied that Kitty had a charm. Miss Keating was not denying it, even now, when she was saying to herself that Kitty had a way of attracting very disagreeable attention.

At first she had supposed that this was an effect of Kitty's charm, disagreeable to Kitty. Then, even in the beginning, she had seen that there was something deliberate and perpetual in Kitty's challenge of the public eye. The public eye, so far from pursuing Kitty, was itself pursued, tracked down and captured. Kitty could n't let it go. Publicity was what Kitty coveted.

She had then supposed that Kitty was used to it; that she was, in some mysterious way, a personage. There would be temptations, she had imagined, for any one who had a charm that lived thus in the public eye.

And Kitty had her good points, too. There was nobody so easy to live with as Kitty in her private capacity, if she could be said to have one. She never wanted to be amused, or read to, or sat up with late at night, like the opulent invalids Miss Keating had been with hitherto. Miss Keating owed everything she had to Kitty, her health (she was constitutionally anæmic), her magnificent salary, the luxurious gaiety in which they lived and moved (moved, perhaps, rather more than lived). The very combs in her hair were Kitty's. So were the gowns she wore on occasions of splendour and display. It struck her as odd that they were all public, these occasions, things they paid to go to.

It had dawned on her by this time, coldly, disagreeably, that Kitty Tailleur was nobody, nobody, that is to say, in particular. A person of no account in the places where they had stayed. In their three months' wanderings they had never been invited to any private house. Miss Keating could not

account for that air of ill-defined celebrity that hung round Kitty like a scent, and marked her trail.

Not that any social slur seemed to attach to Kitty. The acquaintances she had made in her brief and curious fashion were all, or nearly all, socially immaculate. The friends (they were all men) who came to her of their own intimate accord, belonged, some of them, to an aristocracy higher than that represented by Mr. Lucy or the Colonel. And they had been by no means impervious to Kitty's charm.

From the sounds that came from the billiard-room she gathered that Kitty's charm appealed also to her audience in there. Leaning her body forward so as to listen, Miss Keating became aware that Lucy had returned to the lounge, and was strolling about in it, as if he were looking for somebody. He strolled into the veranda.

The garden was dark now, but a little light fell on the veranda from the open

windows of the lounge. Lucy looked at Mrs. Tailleur's empty chair. He was about to sit in it when he saw that he was alone with Mrs. Tailleur's companion. He rose again for flight. Miss Keating rose also with the same intention.

Lucy protested. "Please don't let me disturb you. I am not going to sit here."

"But I am driving you in."

"Not at all. I only thought you might object to my smoking."

"But I don't object."

"You don't, really?"

"If I stay," said she, "will that prove it?"

"Please do," said Lucy.

Miss Keating pushed her chair as far as possible from his. She seated herself with a fugitive, sidelong movement; as much as to say she left him to the sanctuary he sought. He would please to observe the perfection of her withdrawal. The table with the match-stand on it stood between them.

Lucy approached the match-stand tenta-

tively. Miss Keating, averted and effaced, was yet aware of him.

"I'm afraid there are no matches," said she. "Mrs. Tailleur has used them all." So effaced and so averted was Miss Keating that there was nothing left of her but a sweet, attenuated, disembodied voice. It was as if spirit spoke to spirit with the consecrated doors between.

Lucy smiled. He paused at Mrs. Tailleur's chair.

"Is your friend coming back again?" he asked.

"I don't think so."

It might have been an effect of her remoteness, but Miss Keating's tone conveyed to him ever so slight a repudiation of Mrs. Tailleur.

He seated himself; and as he did so he searched his coat pockets. There were no matches there. He knew he would find some in the lounge. Perhaps he might find Mrs. Tailleur also. He would get up and look.

Miss Keating (still disembodied) rose and withdrew herself completely, and Lucy thought better of his intention. He lay back and closed his eyes.

A light tap on the table roused him. It was Miss Keating laying down a match-box. He saw her hand poised yet in the delicacy of its imperceptible approach.

He stared, stupefied with embarrassment. He stuttered with it. "Really — I — I — I wish you had n't." He did not take up the match-box all at once, lest he should seem prompt in accepting this rather extraordinary service.

Mrs. Tailleur's companion slid back into her seat and sat there smiling to herself and to the incommunicative night.

"I hope," she said presently, "you are not refraining from smoking because of me."

She was very sweet and soft and gentle. But she had not struck him as gentle or soft or sweet when he had seen her with Mrs.

Tailleur, and he was not prepared to take that view of her now.

"Thank you," he said. He could not think of anything else to say. He lit his cigarette, and smoked in an innocent abstraction.

A clock indoors struck ten. Miss Keating accounted for her continuance. "It is the only quiet place in the hotel," said she.

He assented, wondering if this were meant for a conversational opening.

"And the night air is so very sweet and pure."

"I'm afraid you find this smoke of mine anything but ——"

"If you are so serious about it," said she, "I shall be afraid either to stay out or to go in."

If there were any opening there he missed it. He had turned at the sound of a skirt trailing, and he saw that Mrs. Tailleur had come back into the lounge. He was thoughtful for a moment. Then he got up quietly and went in.

He did not speak to her or look at her. He sat very still in a corner of the room where he could see her reflection in a big mirror. It did not occur to him that Mrs. Tailleur could see his, too.

Outside in the veranda, Miss Keating sat shuddering in the night air.

CHAPTER IV

LUCY'S mind was like his body. Superficial people called it narrow, because the sheer length of it diverted their attention from its breadth. Visionary, yet eager for the sound impact of the visible, it was never more alert than when it, so to speak, sat still, absorbed in its impressions. It was the sport of young and rapid impulses, which it seemed to obey sluggishly, while, all the time, it moved with immense, slow strides to incredibly far conclusions. Having reached a conclusion it was apt to stay there. The very length of its stride made turning awkward for it.

He had reached a conclusion now, on his third night in Southbourne. He must do something, he did not yet know what, for the protection of Mrs. Tailleur.

Her face was an appeal to the chivalry

that sat quiet in Lucy's heart, nursing young dreams of opportunity.

Lucy's chivalry had been formed by three weeks of courtship and three years of wedded incompatibility. The incompatibility had hardly dawned on him when his wife died. Three years were too short a space for Lucy's mind to turn in; and so he always thought of her tenderly as dear little Amy. She had given him two daughters and paid for the younger with her life.

Five years of fatherhood finished his training in the school of chivalry. He had been profoundly moved by little Amy's sacrifice to the powers of life, and he was further touched by the heartrending spectacle of Jane. Jane doing all she knew for him; Jane, so engaging in her innocence, hiding her small, childlike charm under dark airs of assumed maternity; Jane, whose skirts fluttered wide to all the winds of dream; Jane with an apron on and two little girls tied to the strings of it; Jane, adorable in

disaster, striving to be discreet and comfortable and competent.

He had a passionate pity for all creatures troubled and unfortunate. And Mrs. Tailleur's face called aloud to him for pity. For Lucy Mrs. Tailleur's face wore, like a veil, the shadow of the incredible past and of the future; it was reminiscent and prophetic of terrible and tragic things. Across the great spaces of the public rooms his gaze answered her call. Then Mrs. Tailleur's face would become dumb. Like all hurt things, she was manifestly shy of observation and pursuit.

Pursuit and observation, perpetual, implacable, were what she had to bear. The women had driven her from the drawing-room; the men made the smoke-room impossible. A cold, wet mist came with the evenings. It lay over the sea and drenched the lawns of the hotel garden. Mrs. Tailleur had no refuge but the lounge.

To-night the wine-faced man and his

companion had tracked her there. Mrs. Tailleur had removed herself from the corner where they had hemmed her in. She had found an unoccupied sofa near the writing-table. The pursuer was seized instantly with a desire to write letters. Mrs. Tailleur went out and shivered on the veranda. His eyes followed her. In passing she had turned her back on the screened hearth-place where Lucy and his sister sat alone.

"Did you see that?" said Lucy.

"I did indeed," said Jane.

"It's awful that a woman should be exposed to that sort of thing. What can her people be thinking of?"

"Her people?"

"Yes; to let her go about alone."

"I go about alone," said Jane pensively.

"Yes, but she's so good looking."

"Am *I* not?"

"You're all right, Jenny; but you never looked like that. There's something about her ——"

"Is that what makes those men horrid to her?"

"Yes, I suppose so. The brutes!" He paused irritably. "It must n't happen again."

"What 's the poor lady to do?" said Jane.

"She can't do anything. *We* must."

"We?"

"I must. You must. Go out to her, Janey, and be nice to her."

"No, you go and say I sent you."

He strode out on to the veranda. Mrs. Tailleur sat with her hands in her lap, motionless, and, to his senses, unaware.

"Mrs. Tailleur."

She started and looked up at him.

"My sister asked me to tell you that there 's a seat for you in there, if you don't mind sitting with us."

"But won't you mind me?"

"Not — not," said Lucy (he positively stammered), "not if you don't mind us."

Mrs. Tailleur looked at him again, wide eyed, with the strange and pitiful candour of distrust. Then she smiled incomprehensibly.

Her eyelids dropped as she slid past him to the seat beside Jane. He noticed that she had the sudden, furtive ways of the wild thing aware of the hunter.

"May I really?" said Mrs. Tailleur.

"Oh, *please*," said Jane.

As she spoke the man at the writing-table looked up and stared. Not at Mrs. Tailleur this time, but at Jane. He stared with a wonder so spontaneous, so supreme, that it purged him of offence.

He stared again (with less innocence) at Lucy as the young man gave way, reverently, to the sweep of Mrs. Tailleur's gown. Lucy's face intimated to him that he had made a bad mistake. The wretch admitted, by a violent flush, that it was possible. Then his eyes turned again to Mrs. Tailleur. It was as much as to say he had only been

relying on the incorruptible evidence of his senses.

Mrs. Tailleur sat down and breathed hard.

"How sweet of you!" Her voice rang with the labour of her breast.

Lucy smiled as he caught the word. He would have condemned the stress of it, but that Mrs. Tailleur's voice pleaded forgiveness for any word she chose to utter. "Even," he said to himself, "if you could forget her face."

He could n't forget it. As he sat there trying to read, it came between him and his book. It tormented him to find its meaning. Kitty's face was a thing both delicate and crude. When she was gay it showed a blurred edge, a fineness in peril. When she was sad it wore the fixed look of artificial maturity. It was like a young bud opened by inquisitive fingers and forced to be a flower. Some day, the day before it withered, the bruised veins would glow again, and a hectic spot betray, like a bruise, the violation

of its bloom. At the moment, repose gave back its beauty to Kitty's face. Lucy noticed that the large black pupils of her eyes were ringed with a dark blue iris, spotted with black. There was no colour about her at all except that blue, and the delicate red of her mouth. In her black gown she was a revelation of pure form. Colour would have obscured her, made her ineffectual.

He sat silent, hardly daring to look at her. So keen was his sense of her that he could almost have heard the beating of her breast against her gown. Once she sighed, and Lucy stirred. Once she stirred slightly, and Lucy, unconsciously responsive, sighed. Then Kitty's glance lit on him. He turned a page of his book ostentatiously, and Kitty's glance slunk home again. She closed her eyes and opened them to find Lucy's eyes looking at her over the top of his book. Poor Lucy was so perturbed at being detected in that particular atrocity that he rose, drew his chair to the hearth, and arranged him-

self in an attitude that made these things impossible.

He was presently aware of Jane launching herself on a gentle tide of conversation, and of Mrs. Tailleur trembling pathetically on the brink of it.

"Do you like Southbourne?" he heard Jane saying.

Then suddenly Mrs. Tailleur plunged in.

"No," said she; "I hate it. I hate any place I have to be alone in, if it 's only for five minutes."

Lucy felt that it was Jane who drew back now, in sheer distress. He tried to think of something to say, and gave it up, stultified by his compassion.

The silence was broken by Jane.

"Robert," said she, "have you written to the children?"

Mrs. Tailleur's face became suddenly sombre and intent.

"No; I have n't. I clean forgot it."

He went off to write his letter. When he

came back Mrs. Tailleur had risen and was saying good night to Jane.

He followed her to the portière and drew it back for her to pass. As she turned to thank him she glanced up at the hand that held the portière. It trembled violently. Her eyes, a moment ago dark under her bent forehead, darted a sudden light sidelong.

She paused, interrogative, expectant. Lucy bowed.

As Mrs. Tailleur passed out she looked back over her shoulder, smiling again her incomprehensible smile.

The portière dropped behind her.

CHAPTER V

FIVE days passed. The Lucys had now been a week at Southbourne. They knew it well by that time, for bad weather kept them from going very far beyond it. Jane had found, too, that they had to know some of the visitors. The little Cliff Hotel brought its guests together with a geniality unknown to its superb rival, the Métropole. Under its roof, in bad weather, persons not otherwise incompatible became acquainted with extraordinary rapidity. People had begun already to select each other. Even Mr. Soutar, the clergyman, had emerged from his lonely gloom, and dined by preference at the same table with the middle-aged ladies — the table farthest from the bay window. The Hankins, out of pure kindness, had taken pity on the old lady, Mrs. Jurd. They had made advances to the

Lucys, perceiving an agreeable social affinity, and had afterward drawn back. For the Lucys were using the opportunity of the weather for cultivating Mrs. Tailleur.

It was not easy, they told themselves, to get to know her. She did not talk much. But as Jane pointed out to Robert, little things came out, things that proved that she was all right. Her father was a country parson, very strait-laced, they gathered; and she had little sisters, years younger than herself. When she talked at all it was in a pretty, innocent way, like a child's, and all her little legends were, you could see, transparently consistent. They had, like a child's, a quite funny reiterance and simplicity. But, like a child, she was easily put off by any sort of interruption. When she thought she had let herself go too far, she would take fright and avoid them for the rest of the day, and they had to begin all over again with her next time.

The thing, Lucy said, would be for Jane

to get her some day all alone. But Jane said, No; Mrs. Tailleur was ten times more afraid of her than of him. Besides, they had only another week, and they did n't want, did they, to see *too* much of Mrs. Tailleur? At that Lucy got very red, and promised his sister to take her out somewhere by themselves the next fine day.

That was on Wednesday evening, when it was raining hard.

The weather lifted with the dawn. The heavy smell of the wet earth was pierced by the fine air of heaven and the sea.

Jane Lucy leaned out of her bedroom window and looked eastward beyond the hotel garden to the Cliff. The sea was full of light. Light rolled on the low waves and broke on their tops like foam. It hung quivering on the white face of the Cliff. It was like a thin spray thrown from the heaving light of the sea.

At breakfast Jane reminded Robert of his promise to take her for a sail on the first

fine day. They turned their backs on the hotel and went seaward. On their way to the boats they passed Mrs. Tailleur sitting on the beach in the sun.

Neither of them enjoyed that expedition. It was the first of all the things they had done together that had failed. Jane wondered why. If they were not enjoying themselves on a day like that, when, she argued, would they enjoy themselves? The day remained as perfect as it had begun. There was nothing wrong, Robert admitted, with the day. They sailed in the sun's path and landed in a divine and solitary cove. Robert was obliged to agree that there was nothing wrong with the cove, and nothing, no nothing in the least wrong with the lunch. There might, yes, of course there might, be something very wrong with him.

Whatever it was, it disappeared as they sighted Southbourne. Robert, mounting with uneasy haste the steps that led from the beach to the hotel garden, was unusually gay.

They were late for dinner, and the table next theirs was empty. Outside, on the great green lawn in front of the windows, he could see Mrs. Tailleur walking up and down, alone.

He dined with the abstraction of a man pursued by the hour of an appointment. He established Jane in the lounge, with all the magazines he could lay his hands on, and went out by the veranda on to the lawn where Mrs. Tailleur was still walking up and down.

The Colonel and his wife were in the veranda. They made a low sound of pity as they saw him go.

Mrs. Tailleur seemed more than ever alone. The green space was bare around her as if cleared by the sweep of her gown. She moved quietly, with a long and even undulation, a yielding of her whole body to the rhythm of her feet. She had reached the far end of the lawn as Lucy neared her, and he looked for her to turn and face him.

She did not turn.

The lawn at this end was bounded by a

gravel walk. The walk was fenced by a low stone wall built on the edge of the Cliff. Mrs. Tailleur paused there and seated herself sideways on the wall. Her face was turned from Lucy, and he judged her unaware of his approach. In his eyes she gained a new enchantment from the vast and simple spaces of her background, a sea of dull purple, a sky of violet, divinely clear. Her face had the intense, unsubstantial pallor, the magic and stillness of flowers that stand in the blue dusk before night.

She turned at the sound of the man's footsteps on the gravel. She smiled quietly, as if she knew of his coming, and was waiting for it there. He greeted her. A few words of no moment passed between them, and there was a silence. He stood by the low wall with his face set seaward, as if all his sight were fixed on the trail of smoke that marked the far-off passage of a steamer. Mrs. Tailleur's face was fixed on his. He was aware of it.

Standing beside her, he was aware, too, of something about her alien to sea and sky; something secret, impenetrable, that held her, as it were, apart, shut in by her own strange and solitary charm.

And she sat there in the deep quiet of a woman intent upon her hour. He had no ear for the call of her silence, for the voice of the instincts prisoned in blood and brain.

Presently she rose, shrugging her shoulders and gathering her furs about her.

"I want to walk," she said; "will you come?"

She led the way to the corner where the low wall was joined by a high one, dividing the hotel garden from the open down. There was a gate here; it led to a flight of wooden steps that went zig-zag to the beach below. At the first turn in the flight a narrow path was cut on the Cliff side. To the right it rose inland, following the slope of the down. To the left it ran level under the low wall, then climbed higher yet to the brow of the

headland. There it ended in a square recess, a small white chamber cut from the chalk and open to the sea and sky. From the floor of the recess the Cliff dropped sheer to the beach two hundred feet below.

Mrs. Tailleur took the path to the left. Lucy followed her.

The path was stopped by the bend of the great Cliff, the recess roofed by its bulging forehead. There was a wooden seat set well back under this cover. Two persons who found themselves alone there might count on security from interruption.

Mrs. Tailleur and Lucy were alone.

Lucy looked at the Cliff wall in front of them.

"We must go back," said he.

"Oh no," said she; "don't let 's go back."

"But if you want to walk ——"

"I don't," said she; "do you?"

He did n't, and they seated themselves. In the charm of this intimate seclusion Lucy became more than ever dumb. Mrs. Tailleur waited a few minutes in apparent meditation.

All Lucy said was "May I smoke?"

"You may." She meditated again.

"I was wondering," said she, "whether you were ever going to say anything."

"I did n't know," said Lucy simply, "whether I might. I thought you were thinking."

"So I was. I was thinking of what you were going to say next. I never met anybody who said less and took so long a time to say it in."

"Well," said Lucy, "I was thinking too."

"I know you were. You need n't be so afraid of me unless you like."

"I am not," said he stiffly, "in the least afraid of you. I 'm desperately afraid of saying the wrong thing."

"To me? Or everybody?"

"Not everybody."

"To me, then. Do you think I might be difficult?"

"Difficult?"

"To get on with?"

"Not in the least. Possibly, if I may say so, a little difficult to know."

She smiled. "I don't usually strike people in that light."

"Well, I think I 'm afraid of boring you."

"You could n't if you tried from now to midnight."

"How do you know what I might n't do?"

"That 's it. I don't know. I never *should* know. It 's only the people I 'm sure of that bore me. Don't they you?"

He laughed uneasily.

"The people," she went on, "who are sure of *me;* who think I 'm so easy to know. They don't know me, and they don't know that I know them. And they 're the only people I've ever, ever met. I can tell what they 're going to say before they 've said it. It 's always the same thing. It 's — if you like — the inevitable thing. If you can't have anything but the same thing, at least you like it put a little differently. You 'd

think, among them all, they might find it easy to put it a little differently sometimes; but they never do; and it 's the brutal monotony of it that I cannot stand."

"I suppose," said Lucy, "people *are* monotonous."

"They don't know," said she, evidently ignoring his statement as inadequate, "they don't know how sick I am of it — how insufferably it bores me."

"Ah! there you see — that 's what *I 'm* afraid of."

"What?"

"Of saying the wrong thing — the — the same thing."

"That 's it. You 'd say it differently, and it would n't be the same thing at all. And what 's more, I should never know whether you were going to say it or not."

"There 's one thing I 'd like to say to you if I knew how — if I knew how you 'd take it. You see, though I think I know you ——" he hesitated.

"You don't really? You don't know who I am? Or where I come from? Or where I 'm going to? I don't know myself."

"I know," said Lucy, "as much as I 've any right to. But unluckily the thing I want to know ——"

"Is what you have n't any right to?"

"I 'm afraid I have n't. The thing I want to know is simply whether I can help you in any way."

She smiled. "Ah," said she, "you *have* said it."

"Have n't I said it differently?"

"I 'm not sure. You looked different when you said it; that 's something."

"I know I 've no right to say it at all. What I mean is that if I could do anything for you without boring you, without forcing myself on your acquaintance, I 'd be most awfully glad. You know you need n't recognise me afterward unless you like. Have I put it differently now?"

"Yes; I don't think I 've ever heard it put quite that way before."

There was a long pause in which Lucy vainly sought for illumination.

"No," said Mrs. Tailleur, as if to herself; "I should never know what you were going to say or do next."

"Would n't you?"

"No; I did n't know just now whether you were going to speak to me or not. When I said I wanted to walk I did n't know whether you 'd come with me or not."

"I came."

"You came; but when I go ——"

"You 're not going?"

"Yes; to-morrow, perhaps, or the next day. When I go I shall give you my address and ask you to come and see me; but I shan't know whether you 'll come."

"Of course I 'll come."

"There 's no 'of course' about you; that 's the charm of it. I shan 't know until you 're actually there."

"I shall be there all right."

"What? You 'll come?"

"Yes; and I 'll bring my sister."

"Your sister?" She drew back slightly. "Turn round, please — this way — and let me look at you."

He turned, laughing. Her eyes searched his face.

"Yes; you meant that. Why do you want to bring your sister?"

"Because I want you to know her."

"Are you sure — quite — quite sure — you want her to know me?"

"Quite — quite sure. If you don't mind — if she won't bore you."

"Oh, she won't bore me."

"You 're not afraid of that monotony?"

She turned and looked long at him. "You are very like your sister," she said.

"Am I? How? In what way?"

"In the way we 've been talking about. I suppose you know how remarkable you are?"

"No; I really don't think I do."

"Then," said Mrs. Tailleur, "you are all the more remarkable."

"Don't you think," she added, "we had better go back?"

They went back. As they mounted the steps to the garden door they saw Miss Keating approaching it from the inside. She moved along the low wall that overlooked the path by which they had just come. There was no crunching of pebbles under her feet. She trod, inaudibly, the soft edge of the lawn.

Lucy held the door open for Miss Keating when Mrs. Tailleur had passed through; but Miss Keating had turned suddenly. She made the pebbles on the walk scream with the vehemence of her retreat.

"Dear me," said Lucy, "it must be rather painful to be as shy as that."

"Must n't it?" said Mrs. Tailleur.

CHAPTER VI

THE next day it rained, fitfully at first, at the will of a cold wind that dragged clouds out of heaven. A gleam of sunshine in the afternoon, then wild rain driven slantwise by the gusts; and now, at five o'clock, no wind at all, but a straight, soaking downpour.

The guests at the Cliff Hotel were all indoors. Colonel Hankin and his wife were reading in a corner of the lounge. Mr. Soutar, the clergyman, was dozing over a newspaper by an imaginary fire. The other men drifted continually from the bar to the billiard-room and back again.

Mrs. Tailleur and Lucy were sitting in the veranda, with rugs round them, watching the rain, and watched by Colonel and Mrs. Hankin.

Jane had gone into the drawing-room to

write letters. There was nobody there but the old lady who sat in the bay of the window, everlastingly knitting, and Miss Keating isolated on a sofa near the door.

Everybody in the hotel was happy and occupied, except Miss Keating. Her eyes followed the labour of Miss Lucy's pen, watching for the stroke that should end it. She had made up her mind that she must speak to her.

Miss Keating was subject to a passion which circumstances were perpetually frustrating. She desired to be interesting, profoundly, personally interesting to people. She disliked publicity partly because it reduced her to mournful insignificance and silence. The few moments in her life which counted were those private ones when she found attention surrendered wholly to her service. She hungered for the unworn, unwearied sympathy of strangers. Her fancy had followed and fastened on the Lucys, perceiving this exquisitely virgin

quality in them. And now she was suffering from an oppression of the nerves that urged her to a supreme outpouring.

Miss Lucy seemed absorbed in her correspondence. She felt that Miss Keating's eyes were upon her, and as she wrote she planned a dexterous retreat. It would, she knew, be difficult, owing to Miss Keating's complete occupation of the sofa by the door.

She had made that lady's acquaintance in the morning, having found her sitting sad and solitary in the lounge. She had then felt that it would be unkind not to say something to her, and she had spent the greater part of the morning saying it. Miss Keating had tracked the thin thread of conversation carefully, as if in search of an unapparent opportunity. Jane, aware of the watchfulness of her method, had taken fright and left her. She had had an awful feeling that Miss Keating was about to bestow a confidence on her; somebody

else's confidence, which Miss Keating had broken badly, she suspected.

Jane had finished her letters. She was addressing the envelopes. Now she was stamping them. Now she was crossing the room. Miss Keating lowered her eyes as the moment came which was to bring her into communion with the Lucys.

Jane had made her way very quietly to the door, and thought to pass through it unobserved, when Miss Keating seemed to leap up from her sofa as from an ambush.

"Miss Lucy," she said, and Jane turned at the penetrating sibilants of her name.

Miss Keating thrust toward her a face of tragic and imminent appeal. A nervous vibration passed through her and communicated itself to Jane.

"What is it?" Jane paused in the doorway.

"May I speak to you a moment?"

"Certainly."

But Miss Keating did not speak. She

stood there, clasping and unclasping her hands. It struck Jane that she was trying to conceal an eagerness of which she was more than half ashamed.

"What is it?" she said again.

Miss Keating sighed. "Will you sit down? Here — I think." She glanced significantly at the old lady who was betraying unmistakable interest in the scene. There was no place where they could sit beyond her range of vision. But the sofa was on the far side of it, and Miss Keating's back protested against observation.

She bent forward, her thin arms stretched out to Jane, her hands locked, as if she still held tight the confidence she offered.

"Miss Lucy," she said, "you were so kind to me this morning, so kind and helpful."

"I did n't know it."

"No, you did n't know it." Miss Keating looked down, and she smiled as if at some pleasant secret of her own. "I think when we are really helping each other we don't

know it. You could n't realise what it meant to me, your just coming up and speaking to me that way."

"I 'm very glad," said Jane; and thought she meant it.

Miss Keating smiled again. "I wonder," she said, "if I might ask you to help me again?"

"If I can."

"You look as if you could. I 'm in a great difficulty, and I would like you — if you would — to give me your advice."

"That," said Jane, "is a very dangerous thing to give."

"It would n't be in this case. If I might only tell you. There 's no one in the hotel whom I can speak to."

"Surely," said Jane, "there is Mrs. Tailleur, your friend."

"My friend? Yes, she is my friend; that's why I can't say anything to her. She *is* the difficulty."

"Indeed," said Jane coldly. Nothing in

Miss Keating appealed to the spirit of adventurous sympathy.

"I have received so much kindness from her. She *is* kind."

"Evidently," said Jane.

"That makes my position so very delicate — so very disagreeable."

"I should think it would."

Miss Keating felt the antipathy in Miss Lucy's tone. "You *do* think it strange of me to come to you when I don't know you?"

"No, no; people are always coming to me. Perhaps because they don't know me."

"Ah, you see, you make them come."

"Indeed I don't. I try to stop them."

"Are you trying to stop me?"

"Yes; I think I am."

"Don't stop me, please."

"But surely it would be better to consult your own people."

Miss Keating paused. Miss Lucy had

suggested the obvious course, which she had avoided for reasons which were not obvious even to herself.

"My own people?" she murmured pensively. "They are not here."

It was not her fault if Miss Lucy jumped to the conclusion that they were dead.

"I wonder," she said. "if you see my difficulty?"

"I see it plainly enough. Mrs. Tailleur has been very kind to you, and you want to leave her. Why?"

"I 'm not sure that I ought to stay."

"You must be the best judge of your obligations."

"There are," said Miss Keating, "other things; I don't know that I 'm a good judge of *them*. You see, I was brought up very carefully."

"Were you?"

"Yes. I 'm not sure that it 's wise to be as careful as all that — to keep young girls in ignorance of things they — things they

must, sooner or later ——" she paused staring as if at an abyss.

"What things?" asked Jane bluntly.

"I don't know what things. I don't *know* anything. I 'm afraid. I 'm so innocent, Miss Lucy, that I 'm like a child in the dark. I think I want some one to hold my hand and tell me there 's nothing there."

"Perhaps there is n't."

"Yes, but it 's so dark that I can't see whether there is or is n't. I'm just like a little child. Except that it imagines things and I don't."

"Don't you? Are you sure you don't let your imagination run away with you sometimes?"

"Not," said Miss Keating, "not on this subject. Even when I 'm brought into contact" — her shoulder-blades obeyed the suggestion of her brain, and shuddered. "I don't know whether it 's good or bad to refuse to face things. I can't help it. All that side of life is so intensely disagreeable to me."

"It 's not agreeable to me," said Jane. "And what *has* it got to do with Mrs. Tailleur?"

Miss Keating smiled queerly. "I don't know. I wish I did."

"If you mean you think she is n't nice, I can tell you I 'm sure you 're mistaken."

"It 's not what *I* think. It 's what other people think."

"What people?"

"The people here."

Little Jane lifted her head superbly.

"*We* think the people here have behaved abominably to Mrs. Tailleur."

She lifted her voice too. She did n't care who heard her. She rose, making herself look as tall as possible.

"And if you 're her friend," said she, "you ought to think so too."

She walked out of the room, still superbly. Miss Keating was left to a painful meditation on misplaced confidence.

CHAPTER VII

SHE had had no intention of betraying Kitty. Kitty, she imagined, had sufficiently betrayed herself. And if she had n't, as long as Kitty chose to behave like a dubious person, she could hardly be surprised if persons by no means dubious refused to be compromised. She, Miss Keating, was in no way responsible for Kitty Tailleur. Neither was she responsible for what other people thought of her. That was all, in effect, that she had intimated to Miss Lucy.

She did not say what she herself precisely thought, nor when she had first felt that uncomfortable sensation of exposure, that little shiver of cold and shame that seized her when in Kitty Tailleur's society. She had no means of measuring the lengths to which Kitty had gone and might yet go. She was simply possessed, driven and lashed by her

vision of Kitty as she had seen her yesterday; Kitty standing at the end of the garden, on the watch for Mr. Lucy; Kitty returning, triumphant, with the young man at her heels.

She had seen Kitty with other men before, but there was something in this particular combination that she could not bear to think of. All the same, she had lain awake half the night thinking of it. She had Kitty Tailleur and Mr. Lucy on her nerves.

She had desired a pretext for approaching Miss Lucy, and poor Kitty was a pretext made to her hand. Nothing could be more appealing than the spectacle of helpless innocence struggling with a problem as terrible as Kitty. Miss Keating knew all the time that as far as she was concerned there was no problem. If she disliked being with Kitty she had nothing to do but to pack up and go. Kitty had said in the beginning that if she did n't like her she must go.

That course was obvious but unattractive. And the most obvious and most unattractive

thing about it was that it would not have brought her any further with the Lucys, It would, in fact, have removed her altogether from their view.

But she had done for herself now with the Lucys. She should have kept her nerves to herself, rasped, as they were to a treacherous tenuity. And as the state of her nerves was owing to Kitty, she held Kitty responsible for the crisis. She writhed as she thought of it. She writhed as she thought of Mr. Lucy. She writhed as she thought of Kitty; and writhing, she rubbed her own venom into her hurt.

Of course she would have to leave Kitty now.

But, if she did, the alternatives were grim. She would have either to go back to her own people, or to look after somebody's children, or an invalid. Her own people were not interested in Miss Keating. Children and invalids demanded imperatively that she should be interested in them.

And Miss Keating, unfortunately, was not interested in anybody but herself.

So interested was she that she had forgotten the old lady who sat knitting in the window, who, distracted by Miss Lucy's outburst, had let her ball roll on to the floor. It rolled away across the room to Miss Keating's feet, and there was a great tangle in the wool. Miss Keating picked up the ball and brought it to the old lady, winding and disentangling it as she went.

"Thank you; my wool is a nuisance to everybody," said the old lady. And she began to talk about her knitting. All the year round she knitted comforters for the deep-sea fishermen, gray and red and blue. When she was tired of one colour she went to another. It would be red's turn next.

Miss Keating felt as if she were being drawn to the old lady by that thin thread of wool. And the old lady kept looking at her all the time.

"Your face is familiar to me," she said. (Oddly enough, the old lady's face

was familiar to Miss Keating.) "I have met you somewhere; I cannot think where."

"I wonder," said Miss Keating, "if it was at Wenden, my father's parish?"

The old lady's look was sharper. "Your father is the vicar of Wenden?"

"Yes."

"I thought so."

"Do you know him?" The ball slipped from Miss Keating's nervous fingers and the wool was tangled worse than ever.

"No, no; but I could tell that you were ——" she hesitated. "It was at Ilkley that I met you. It 's coming back to me You were not then with Mrs. Tailleur, I think? You were with an invalid lady?"

"Yes; I was until I broke down."

"May I ask if you knew Mrs. Tailleur before you came to her?"

"No. I knew nothing of her. I know nothing now."

"Oh," said the old lady. It was as if she had said: that settles it.

The wool was disentangled. It was winding them nearer and nearer.

"Have you been with her long?"

"Not more than three months."

There were only five inches of wool between them now. "Do you mind telling me where you picked her up?"

Miss Keating remembered with compunction that it was Kitty who had picked *her* up. Picked her up, as it were, in her arms, and carried her away from the dreadful northern Hydropathic where she had dropped, forlorn and exhausted, in the trail of her opulent invalid.

"It was at Matlock, afterward. Why?"

"Because, my dear — you must forgive me, but I could not help hearing what that young lady said. She was so very — so very unrestrained."

"Very ill-bred, I should say."

"Well, I should not have said that. You could n't mistake the Lucys for anything but gentlepeople. Evidently I was

meant to hear. I 've no doubt she thinks us all very unkind.

"Unkind? Why?"

"Because we have — have not exactly taken to Mrs. Tailleur; if you 'll forgive my saying so."

Miss Keating's smile forgave her. "People do not always take to her. She is more a favourite, I think, with men." She gave the ball into the old lady's hands.

The old lady coughed slightly. "Thank you, my dear. I dare say *you* have thought it strange. We are such a friendly little community here; and if Mrs. Tailleur had been at all possible ——"

"I believe," said Miss Keating, "she is very well connected. Lord Matcham is a most intimate friend of hers."

"That does n't speak very well for Lord Matcham, I 'm afraid."

"I wish," said Miss Keating, "you would be frank with me."

"I should like to be, my dear."

"Then, please — if there's anything you think I should be told — tell me."

"I think you ought to be told that we all are wondering a little at your being seen with Mrs. Tailleur. You are too nice, if I may say so, and she is — well, not the sort of person you should be going about with."

Miss Keating's mouth opened slightly.

"Do you know anything about her?"

"I know less than you do. I'm only going by what Colonel Hankin says."

"Colonel Hankin?"

"Mrs. Hankin, I should say; of course I could n't speak about Mrs. Tailleur to *him*."

"Has he ever met her?"

"Met her? In society? My dear! — he has never met her anywhere."

"Then would he — would he really know?"

"It is n't only the Colonel. All the men in the hotel say the same thing. You can see how they stare at her."

"Oh, those men!"

"You may depend upon it, they know more than we do."

"How can they? How—how do they tell?"

"I suppose they see something."

Miss Keating saw it, too. She shuddered involuntarily. Her knees shook under her. She sat down.

"I'm sure I don't know what it is," said the old lady.

"Nor I," said Miss Keating faintly.

"They say you've only got to look at her ——"

A dull flush spread over Miss Keating's face. She was breathing hard. Her mouth opened to speak; a thick sigh came through it, but no words.

"I've looked," said the old lady, "and I can't see anything about her different from other people. She dresses so quietly; but I'm told they often do. They're very careful that we should n't know them."

"They? Oh, you don't mean that Mrs. Tailleur — is ——"

"I'm only going by what I 'm told. Mind you, I get it all from Mrs. Hankin."

Miss Keating, who had been leaning forward, sat suddenly bolt upright. Her whole body was shaking now. Her voice was low but violent.

"Oh — oh — I knew it — I knew. I always felt there was something about her."

"I 'm sure, my dear, you did n't *know*."

"I did n't. I did n't think it was that; I only thought she was n't nice. I thought she was fast, or she 'd been divorced, or something — something terrible of that sort."

She still sat bolt upright, gazing open-eyed, open-mouthed at the terror. She was filled with a fierce excitement, a sort of exultation. Then doubt came to her.

"But surely — surely the hotel people would know?"

"Hotel people never know anything that is n't their interest to know. If there were any complaint, or if any of the guests were

to leave on account of her, Mrs. Tailleur would have to go."

"And has there been any complaint?"

"I believe Mr. Soutar — the clergyman — has spoken to the manager."

"And the manager?"

"Well, you see, Mr. Soutar is always complaining. He complained about the food, and about his bedroom. He has the cheapest bedroom in the hotel."

Miss Keating was thinking hard. Her idea was that Kitty Tailleur should go, and that she should remain.

"Don't you think if Colonel Hankin spoke to the manager ——"

"He would n't. He's much too kind. Besides, the manager can't do anything as long as she behaves herself. And now that the Lucys have taken her up ——. And then, there's you. Your being with her is her great protection. As she very well knew when she engaged you."

"I was engaged for *that?*"

"There can be very little doubt of it."

"Oh! then nobody thinks that I knew it? That I'm like her?"

"Nobody *could* think that of you."

"What am I to do? I'm so helpless, and I've no one to advise me. And it's not as if we really knew anything."

"My dear, I think you should leave her."

"Of course I shall leave her. I can't stay another day. But I don't know how I ought to do it."

"Would you like to consult Colonel Hankin?"

"Oh no; I don't think I could bear to speak about it to him."

"Well — and perhaps he would not like to be brought into it, either."

"Then what reason can I give her?"

"Of course you cannot tell her what you've heard."

Miss Keating was silent.

"Or if you do, you must please not give me as your informant."

"I will not do that."

"Nor — please — Colonel and Mrs. Hankin. We none of us want to be mixed up with any unpleasant business."

"You may trust me," said Miss Keating. "I am very discreet."

She rose. The old lady held her with detaining eyes.

"What shall you do when you have left her?"

"I suppose I shall have to look for another place."

"You are not going home, then?"

Miss Keating's half-smile hinted at renunciation. "I have too many younger sisters."

"Well, let me see. I shall be going back to Surbiton the day after to-morrow. How would it be if you were to come with me?"

"Oh, Mrs. — Mrs.——" The smile wavered, but it held its place.

"Mrs. Jurd. If we suited each other you might stay with me, at any rate for a

week or two. I 've been a long time looking out for a companion."

Miss Keating's smile was now strained with hesitation. Mrs. Jurd was not an invalid, and she was interested in Miss Keating. These were points in her favour. On the other hand, nobody who could do better would choose to live with Mrs. Jurd and wind wool and talk about the deep-sea fishermen.

"I am living," said Mrs. Jurd, "with my nephew at Surbiton. I have to keep his house for him."

"Then do you think you would really need any one?"

"Indeed I do. My nephew is n't a companion for me. He 's in the city all day and out most evenings, or he brings his friends in and they get smoking."

Miss Keating's smile was now released from its terrible constraint. A slight tremor, born of that deliverance, passed over her face, and left it rosy. But having committed

herself to the policy of hesitation she had a certain delicacy in departing from it now.

"Are you quite sure you would care to have *me?*"

"My dear, I am quite sure that I don't care to have any one who is not a lady; and I am quite sure that I am talking to a lady. It is very seldom in these days that one can be sure."

Miss Keating made a little bow and blushed.

After a great deal of conversation it was settled that she should exchange the Cliff Hotel for the Métropole that night, and that she should stay there until she left Southbourne for Surbiton, with Mrs. Jurd.

When Colonel and Mrs. Hankin looked in to report upon the weather, this scheme was submitted to them as to supreme judges in a question of propriety.

Mrs. Tailleur was not mentioned. Her name stood for things that decorous persons do not mention, except under certain sanctions and the plea of privilege. The Colonel

might mention them to his wife, and his wife might mention them to Mrs. Jurd, who might pass them on with unimpeachable propriety to Miss Keating. But these ladies were unable to discuss Mrs. Tailleur in the presence of the Colonel. Still, as none of them could do without her, she was permitted to appear in a purified form, veiled in obscure references, or diminished to an innocent abstraction.

Miss Keating, Mrs. Jurd said, was not at all satisfied with her — er — her present situation.

The Colonel lowered his eyes for one iniquitous instant while Mrs. Tailleur, disguised as Miss Keating's present situation, laughed through the veil and trailed before him her unabashed enormity.

He managed to express, with becoming gravity, his approval of the scheme. He only wondered whether it might not be better for Miss Keating to stay where she was until the morning, that her step might not seem so precipitate, so marked.

Miss Keating replied that she thought she had been sufficiently compromised already.

"I don't think," said the Colonel, "that I should put it that way."

He felt that by putting it that way Miss Keating had brought them a little too near what he called the verge, the verge they were all so dexterously avoiding. He would have been glad if he could have been kept out of this somewhat perilous debate, but, since the women had dragged him into it, it was his business to see that it was confined within the limits of comparative safety. Goodness knew where they would be landed if the women lost their heads.

He looked gravely at Miss Keating.

That look unnerved her, and she took a staggering step that brought her within measurable distance of the verge.

The Colonel might put it any way he liked, she said. There must not be a moment's doubt as to her attitude.

Now it was not her attitude that the

Colonel was thinking of, but his own. It had been an attitude of dignity, of judicial benevolence, of incorruptible reserve. Any sort of unpleasantness was agony to a man who had the habit of perfection. It was dawning on him that unless he exercised considerable caution he would find himself mixed up in an uncommonly disagreeable affair. He might even be held responsible for it, since the dubiousness of the topic need never have emerged if he had not unveiled it to his wife. So that, when Miss Keating, in her unsteadiness, declared that there must not be a moment's doubt as to her attitude, the Colonel himself was seized with a slight vertigo. He suggested that people (luckily he got no nearer it than that) — people were, after all, entitled to the benefit of any doubt there might be.

Then, when the danger was sheer in front of them, he drew back. Miss Keating, he said, had nobody but herself to please. He had no more light to throw on the — er — the

situation. Really, he said to himself, they could n't have hit on a more serviceable word.

He considered that he had now led the discussion to its close, on lines of irreproachable symbolism. Nobody had overstepped the verge. Mrs. Tailleur had not once been mentioned. She might have disappeared behind the shelter provided by the merciful, silent decencies. Colonel Hankin had shown his unwillingness to pursue her into the dim and undesirable regions whence she came.

Then suddenly Miss Keating cried out her name.

She had felt herself abandoned, left there, all alone on the verge, and before any of them knew where they were she was over it. Happily, she was unaware of the violence with which she went. She seemed to herself to move, downward indeed, but with a sure and slow propulsion. She believed herself challenged to the demonstration by the Colonel's attitude. The high distinction

of it, that was remotely akin to Mr. Lucy's, somehow obscured and degraded her. She conceived a dislike to this well-behaved and honourable gentleman, and to his visible perfections, the clean, silver whiteness and the pinkness of him.

His case was clear to her. He was a man, and he had looked at Kitty Tailleur, and his sympathies, like Mr. Lucy's, had suffered an abominable perversion. His judgment, like Mr. Lucy's, had surrendered to the horrible charm. She said to herself bitterly, that she could not compete with *that*.

She trembled as she faced the Colonel. "Very well, then," said she, "as there is no one to help me I must protect myself. I shall not sleep another night under the same roof as Mrs. Tailleur."

The three winced as if the name had been a blow struck at them. The Colonel's silver eyebrows rose bristling. Mrs. Hankin got up and went out of the room. Mrs. Jurd bent her head over her knitting. None of

them looked at Miss Keating; not even the Colonel, as he spoke.

"If you feel like that about it," said he, "there is nothing more to be said."

He rose and followed his wife.

Upstairs, when their bedroom door had closed on them, he reproved her very seriously for her indiscretion.

"You asked me," said he, "what I thought of Mrs. Tailleur, and I told you; but I never said you were to go and hand it on. What on earth have you been saying to those women?"

"I did n't say anything to Miss Keating."

"No, but you must have done to Mrs. What 's-her-name?"

"Not very much. I don't like talking about unpleasant subjects, as you know."

"Well, somebody 's been talking about them. I should n't wonder, after this, if poor Mrs. Tailleur's room were wanted to-morrow."

"Oh, do you think they 'll turn her out?"

She was a kind woman and she could not bear to think it would come to that.

The Colonel was silent. He was sitting on the bed, watching his wife as she undid the fastenings of her gown. At that moment a certain brief and sudden sin of his youth rose up before him. It looked at him pitifully, reproachfully, with the eyes of Mrs. Tailleur.

"I wish," said Mrs. Hankin, "we had n't said anything at all."

"So do I," said the Colonel. But for the life of him he could n't help saying something more. "If she goes," he said, "I rather think that young fellow will go, too."

"And the sister?"

"Oh, the sister, I imagine, will remain."

CHAPTER VIII

KITTY was dressed. She was calling out to her companion, "Bunny, hurry up, you 'll be late." No answer came from the adjoining room. She tapped a the door and there was no answer. She tried to open the door. It was locked on the inside. "Bunny," she cried, "are you there?" She laid her ear to the panel. There was the sound of a box being dragged across the floor.

"You *are* there, are you? Why don't you answer? I can't hear you. Why can't you open the door?"

Miss Keating unlocked the door. She held it ajar and spoke through the aperture.

"Be good enough," she said, "to leave me alone."

"All right; but you 'll be awfully late for dinner."

"I am not coming down to dinner."

Miss Keating shut the door, but she did not lock it.

Kitty gave a cry of distress.

"Bunny, what *is* the matter? Let me in — do let me in."

"You can come in if you like."

Kitty opened the door. But instead of going in, she stood fixed upon the threshold, struck dumb by what she saw.

The room was in disorder. Clothes littered the bed. More clothes were heaped on the floor around an open trunk. Miss Keating was kneeling on the floor seizing on things and thrusting them into the trunk. Their strangled, tortured forms witnessed to the violence of her mood.

"What *are* you doing?"

"You can see what I 'm doing. I am packing my things."

"Why?"

"Because I am going away."

"Have you had bad news? Is — is anybody dead?"

"I would n't ask any questions if I were you."

"I must ask some. You know, people *don't* walk off like this without giving any reason."

"I am surprised at your asking for my reason."

"Sur—prised," said Kitty softly. "Are you going because of me?"

Miss Keating did not answer.

"I see. So you don't like me any more?"

"We won't put it that way."

Kitty came and stood beside Miss Keating and looked down at her.

"Bunny, have I been a brute to you?"

"No."

"Have I ever been a brute to any one? Have you ever known me do an unkind thing, or say an unkind word to any one?"

"N—no."

"Then why do you listen when people say unkind things about me?"

Miss Keating stooped very low over the

trunk. Her attitude no doubt accounted for the redness of her face which Kitty noticed. "I think I know what they 've been saying. Did you or did you not listen?"

"Listen?"

"Yes. I don't mean behind doors and things. But you let them talk to you?"

"You cannot stop people talking."

"Can't you?" I 'd have stopped them pretty soon if they 'd talked to me about you. What did they say?"

"You 've said just now you knew."

"Very well. Who said it?"

"You 've no reason to assume that anybody has said anything."

"Was it Mr. Lucy, or his sister?"

Miss Keating became agitated.

"I have never discussed you with Mr. Lucy. Or his sister." There was a little click in Miss Keating's throat where the lie stuck.

"I know you have n't. They would n't let you."

Kitty smiled. Miss Keating saw the smile. She trembled. Tears started to her eyes. She rose and began sorting the pile of clothing on the bed.

Something in her action inspired Kitty with an intolerable passion of wonder and of pity. She came to her and laid her hand on her hair, lightly and with a certain fear.

Miss Keating had once purred under Kitty's caresses. Now she jerked back suddenly and beat off the timid hand.

"I wish you would n't touch me."

"Why not?"

"Because it makes me loathe you."

Kitty sat down on the bed. She had wrapped her hand in her pocket-handkerchief as if it had been hurt.

"Poor Bunny," she said; "are you feeling as bad as all that? You must want dreadfully to marry that long man. But you need n't loathe me. I'm not going to make him marry *me*."

"Can you not think of anything but that?"

"I can *think* of all sorts of things. At present I 'm thinking of that. It does seem such an awful pity that you have n't married. A dear little, sweet little, good little thing like you — for you *are* good, Bunny. It 's a shame that you should have to live in rage and fury, and be very miserable, and — and rather cruel, just because of that."

"If every word you said of me was true, I 'd rather be myself than you, Mrs. Tailleur."

"That, Miss Keating, is purely a matter of taste. Unhappiness is all that 's the matter with you. You 'd be quite a kind woman if it was n't for that. You see, I do understand you, Bunny. So it is n't very wise of you to leave me. Think what an awful time you 'll have if you go and live with somebody who does n't understand and won't make allowances. And you 're not strong. You never will be as long as you 're miserable. You 'll go and live with ill old ladies and get into that state you were in at Matlock. And there won't be anybody to

look after you. And, Bunny, you 'll never marry — never; and it 'll be simply awful. You 'll go getting older and older and nervier and nervier, till you 're *so* nervy that even the old ladies won't have you any more. Bad as I am, you 'd better stop with me."

"Stop with you? How can I stop with you?"

"Well, you have n't told me yet why you can't."

"I can't tell you. I — I 've written you a letter. It 's there on the dressing-table."

Kitty went to the dressing-table.

"I am returning you my salary for the quarter I have been with you."

Kitty took up the letter.

"I 'd rather you did not read it until after I am gone."

"That 's not fair, Bunny."

"Please — I 've written what I had to say because I wished to avoid a scene."

"There won't be any scene. I 'm not going to read your beastly letter."

She opened the envelope and removed the notes and laid them on the dressing-table. Then she tore up the letter and the envelope together and tossed them into the grate.

"And I 'm not going to take those notes."

"Nor am I."

"You 'll have to." She found her companion's purse and tucked the notes inside it. Miss Keating turned on her. "Mrs. Tailleur, you shall not thrust your money on me. I will not take it."

"You little fool, you 've got to."

Miss Keating closed her eyes. It was a way she had. "I can't. And you must please take back the things you 've given me. They are all there; in that heap on the bed."

Kitty turned and looked at them. They were all there; everything she had ever given to her, the dresses, the combs, the little trinkets. She took some of these and stared at them as she held them in her hand.

"Won't you keep anything?"

"I won't keep a thing."

"Not even the little chain I gave you? Oh, Bunny, you liked your little chain."

Miss Keating took the chain from her and laid it with the rest.

"Please leave me to pack."

"Presently. Bunny—look at me—straight. Why are you doing this?"

"I wish to be spared the unpleasantness of speaking."

"But you 've got to speak. Out with it. What have I done?"

"You know better than I do what your life has been."

"My life? I should think I did. Rather."

Kitty crossed the room to the bell.

"What time does your train go?"

"My——? I—must leave this at seven-thirty."

Kitty rang the bell. A housemaid appeared.

"I want a fly at seven-thirty. Please see that Miss Keating's luggage is downstairs by then. Her room will not be wanted."

Miss Keating's face was livid.

"You wish," said she, "the hotel people to think that it is you who have given *me* notice?"

"You poor thing. I only wanted the fly to go down to my account."

"You expect me to believe that?"

"I don't expect anything of you — now. I suppose it 's Colonel Hankin who has been talking about my life? It was n't Mr. Lucy, though you 'd like to make me think so."

"There 's no need for anybody to talk. Do you suppose I don't know what you are? You can't hide what 's in you. You 're — you 're full of it. And you 've no shame about it. You can stand there, knowing that I know, and ask me what you 've done. How do I know what you 've done? I don't want to know it. It 's bad enough to know what you are. And to know that I 've been living with it for three months. You got hold of me, an innocent woman,

and used me as a cover for your evil life. That 's all you wanted me for."

"Whatever I 've done, I 've done nothing to deserve that."

"You think not? Have you any idea what you 've done — to me?"

"No; I have n't. What have I done?"

"I 'm going to tell you. You 've never ceased casting it up to me that I 'm not married, that I have n't your attractions — I thank heaven I have not — I am not the sort of woman you take me for. I never have wanted to be married, but if — if ever I had, I should n't want it now. You 've spoilt all that for me. I shall never see a man without thinking of *you*. I shall hate every man I meet because of you."

"Well, hate them, hate them. It 's better than loving them. Let me strap that box. You 'll tear your poor heart out."

Miss Keating wrenched the strap from Kitty's hands.

"Ah, how you hate me! Hate the men,

dear, that can't do you any harm; but don't hate the other women. At my worst I never did that."

Miss Keating shrugged her shoulders, for she was putting on her coat. Kitty looked at her and sighed.

"Bunny," said she, "I want to make it quite clear to you why you 're going. You think it 's because you know something horrible about me. But it is n't. You don't know anything about me. You 've only been listening to some of the people in the hotel. They don't know anything about me either. They 've never met me in their lives before. But they 've been thinking things and saying things, and you 've swallowed it all because you wanted to. You 're so desperately keen on making out there 's something bad about me. Of course, you might have made it out; you might have proved all sorts of things against me. But you have n't. That 's my whole point. You have n't proved a thing, have you? If you were my husband,

and wanted to get rid of me, you 'd have to trump up some evidence, would n't you?"

"There is no need to trump up evidence. I 'm acting on my instinct and belief."

"Oh, I know you believe it all right."

"I can't help what I believe."

"No, you can't help it. You can't help what you want. And you would n't have wanted it if you had n't been so furiously unhappy. I was furiously unhappy myself once. That 's why I understand you."

"It is five-and-twenty minutes past seven, Mrs. Tailleur."

"And in five minutes you 'll go. And you won't hear a word in my defence? You won't? Why, if I 'd murdered somebody and they were going to hang me, they 'd let me defend myself before they did it. All I was going to say was — supposing everything you said was true, I think *you* might have made allowances for me. You can't? I was harder driven than you."

"No two cases could well be more different."

"Once they were the same. Only it was worse for me. All your temptations are bottled up inside you. Mine rushed at me from inside and outside too. I 've had all the things you had. I had a strait-laced parson for my father — so had you. I was poked away in a hole in the country — so were you. I had little sisters — so had you. My mother sent me away from home for fear I should harm them." Her voice shook. "I would n't have harmed them for the world. I was sent to live with an old lady — so were you. I was shut up with her all day, till I got ill and could n't sleep at night. I never saw a soul but one or two other old ladies. They were quite fond of me — I made them. I should have died of it if it had n't been for that. Then — do listen, Bunny — something happened, and I broke loose, and got away. You never had a chance to get away, so you don't know what it feels like. Perhaps, I think, when it came to the point, you 'd have been afraid,

or something. I was n't. And I was young. I 'm young still. You can't judge me. Anyhow, I know what you 've been through. That 's what made me sorry for you. Can 't you be a little sorry for me?"

Miss Keating said nothing. She was putting on her hat, and her mouth at the moment was closed tight over a long hat-pin. She drew it out slowly between her shut lips. Meeting Kitty's eyes she blinked.

"You need n't be sorry," said Kitty. "I 've had things that you have n't."

Miss Keating turned to the looking-glass and put on her veil. Her back was toward Kitty. The two women's faces were in the glass, the young and the middle-aged, each searching for the other. Kitty's face was tearful and piteous; it pleaded with the other face in the glass, a face furtive with hate, that hung between two lifted arms behind a veil.

Miss Keating's hands struggled with her veil.

"I may n't tie it for you?" said Kitty.

"No, thank you."

There was a knock at the door, and Miss Keating started.

"It 's the men for your boxes. Come into my room and say good bye."

"I prefer to say good bye here, if it 's all the same to you. Good bye."

"You won't even shake hands with me? Well, if you won't — why should you?"

"I am holding out my hand. If you won't take it ——"

"No, no. I don't want to take it."

Kitty was crying.

"I must let those men in," said Miss Keating. "You are not going to make a scene?"

"I? Oh Lord, no. You need n't mind me. I 'll go."

She went into her own room and flung herself, face downward, on to her pillow, and slid by the bedside, kneeling, to the floor.

CHAPTER IX

AT EIGHT o'clock Mrs. Tailleur was not to be found in her room, or in any other part of the hotel. By nine Lucy was out on the Cliff-side looking for her. He was not able to account for the instinct that told him she would be there.

The rain had ceased earlier in the evening. Now it was falling again in torrents. He could see that the path was pitted with small, sharp footprints. They turned and returned, obliterating each other.

At the end of the path, in the white chamber under the brow of the Cliff, he made out first a queer, irregular, trailing black mass, then the peak of a hood against the wall, and the long train of a woman's gown upon the floor, and then, between the loops of the hood, the edge of Mrs. Tailleur's white face, dim, but discernible. She sat

sideways, leaning against the wall, in the slack, childlike attitude of exhausted misery.

He came close. She did not stir at the sound of his feet trampling the slush. Her eyes were shut, her mouth open; she breathed, like a child, the half-suffocated breath that comes after long crying. He stood looking at her, tongue-tied with pity. Every now and then her throat shook like a child's with guileless hiccoughing sobs.

He stooped over her and called her name.

"Mrs. Tailleur."

She turned from him and sank sidelong into the corner, hiding her face. The long wings of her cloak parted and hung back from her cowering body. Her thin garments, beaten smooth by the rain, clung like one tissue to the long slope above her knees. Lucy laid his hand gently on her gown. She was drenched to the skin. It struck through, cold and shuddering, to his touch. She pushed his hand away and sat up.

"I think," she said, "you 'd better go away."

"Do you want me to go?"

"I don't want you to see me like this. I 'm — I 'm not pretty to look at."

"That does n't matter in the very least. Besides, I can hardly see you in this light."

He drew her cloak about her and fastened it. He could feel, from the nearness of her flushed mouth, the heat and the taste of grief. She flung her head back to the wall away from him. Her hood slipped, and he put his arm behind her shoulders and raised it, and drew it gently forward to shelter her head from the rough wall. His hand was wet with the rain from her loose hair.

"How long have you been walking about in the rain before you came here?"

She tried to speak, and with the effort her sobs broke out in violence. It struck him again, and with another pang of pity, how like a child she was in the completeness of her abandonment! He sat down beside her, leaning forward, his face hidden

in his hands. He felt that to hide his own face was somehow to screen her.

Her sobbing went on, and her hand, stretched toward him unawares, clutched at the top of the wooden seat.

"Would you like me to go away and come back again?" he said presently.

"No!" she cried. And at her own cry a terrible convulsion shook her. He could feel her whole body strain and stiffen with the effort to control it. Then she was calm.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "I told you, did n't I, that you 'd better go away?"

"Do you suppose that I 'm going to leave you here? Just when I 've found you?"

"Miss Keating 's left me. Did you know?"

"Yes, I heard. Is it -- is it a great trouble to you?"

"Yes." She shook again.

"Surely," he began, and hesitated, and grew bold. "Surely it need n't be? She was n't, was she, such a particularly amiable person?"

"She could n't help it. She was so unhappy."

His voice softened. "You were very fond of her?"

"Yes. How did you know she 'd gone?"

It was too dark in there for him to see the fear in her eyes as she turned them to him.

"Oh," he said, "we heard she 'd left. I suppose she had to go."

"Yes," said Mrs. Tailleur, "she had to go."

"Well, I should n't distress myself any more about it. Tell me, have you been walking about in the rain ever since she left?"

"I — I think so."

"And my little sister was looking for you everywhere. She wanted you to dine with us. We thought you would, perhaps, as you were free."

"That was very good of you."

"We could n't find you anywhere in the hotel. Then I came out here."

"What made you come?"

"I came to look for you."

"To look for me?"

"Yes. You don't mind, do you?"

"How did you know I should be here?"

"I did n't. It was the last place I tried. Do you know it 's past nine o'clock? You must come in now."

"I — can 't."

"Oh yes," he said, "you can. You 're coming back with me."

He talked as he would to a frightened child, to one of his own children.

"I 'm afraid to go back."

"Why?"

"Because of Bunny. She told me people were saying dreadful things about me. That 's why she left. She could n't bear it."

Lucy ground his teeth. "*She* could n't bear it? That shows what she was, does n't it? But you — you don't mind what people say?"

"No," she said, "I don't mind."

"Well ——"

"Yes!" she cried passionately. "I do mind. I 've always minded. It 's just the one thing I can't get over."

"It 's the one thing," said Lucy, "we have to learn to get over. When you 've lived to be as old as I am, you 'll see how very little it matters what people say of us. Especially when we know what other people think."

"Other people?"

"Friends," he said, "the people who really care."

"Ah, if we only could know what they think. That 's the most horrible thing of all — what they think."

"Is that why you don't want to go back?"

Lucy's voice was unsteady and very low.

"Yes," she whispered.

There was a brief silence.

"But if you go back with *me*," he said, "it will be all right, won't it?"

The look in her eyes almost reached him through the darkness, it was so intense.

"No," she said out loud, "it won't. It will be all wrong."

"I don't agree with you. Anyhow, I 'm going to take you back. Come."

"No," she said, "not yet. May n't we stay here a little longer?"

"No, we may n't. You 've got your death of cold as it is."

"I 'm not cold, now. I 'm warm. Feel my hands."

She held them out to him. He did not touch them. But he put his arm round her and raised her to her feet. And they went back together along the narrow Cliff-path. It was dangerous in the perishing light. He took her hands in his now, and led her sidelong. When her feet slipped in the slimy chalk, he held her up with his arm.

At the little gate she turned to him.

"I was kind to Bunny," she said, "I was really."

"I am sure," he said gently, "you are kind to everybody."

"That 's something, is n't it?"

"I 'm not sure that it is n't everything."

They went up the side of the garden, along the shrubbery, by a path that led to the main entrance of the hotel. A great ring of white light lay on the wet ground before the porch, thrown from the electric lamps within.

Mrs. Tailleur stepped back into the darkness by the shrubbery. "Look here," she said, "I 'm going in by myself. You are going round another way. You have not seen me. You don't know where I am. You don't know anything about me."

"I know," said Lucy, "you are coming in with me."

She drew farther back. "I 'm not thinking of myself," she said, "I 'm thinking of you."

She was no longer like a child. Her voice had suddenly grown older.

"Are you?" he said. "Then you 'll do what I ask you." He held her with his

arm and drew her, resisting and unresisting, close to him.

"Ah," she cried, "what are you going to do with me?"

"I am going," he said, "to take you to my sister."

And he went with her, up the steps and into the lighted vestibule, past the hall-porter and the clerk in his bureau and the manager's wife in hers, straight into the lounge, before the Colonel and his wife, and he led her to Jane where she sat in her place beside the hearth.

"It is n't half such a bad night as it looks," said he in a clear voice. "Is it, Mrs. Tailleur?"

CHAPTER X

FIVE minutes later Lucy was talking to Colonel and Mrs. Hankin, with genial unconcern. They never knew that he knew what they had been saying, or how their tongues had scourged Mrs. Tailleur out into the lash of the rain. They never knew that the young man who conversed with them so amiably was longing to take the Colonel by his pink throat and throttle him, nor that it was only a higher chivalry that held him from this disastrous deed. The Colonel merely felt himself in the presence of an incomparable innocence; but whether it was Lucy who was innocent, or Mrs. Tailleur, or the two of them together, he really could not say.

Upstairs, in Mrs. Tailleur's bedroom, Jane Lucy was talking to Mrs. Tailleur. They were sitting be the hearth while Kitty,

clothed in warm garments, shook out her drenched hair before the fire. She had just told Jane how Miss Keating had left her, and she had become tearful again over the telling.

"Need you mind so much? Is she worth it?" said Jane, very much as Robert had said.

"I don't mind her leaving. I can get over that. But you don't know the awful things she said."

"No, I don't; but I dare say she did n't mean half of them."

"Did n't she though! I 'll show you."

Kitty got up and opened the door into the other room. It was as Miss Keating had left it.

"Look there," she said, "what she 's done."

Jane looked. "I 'm not surprised. You did everything for her, so I suppose she expected you to pack and send her things after her."

"It is n't that. Don't you see? It 's —

it 's the things I gave her. She flung them back in my face. She would n't take one of them. See, that 's the white frock she was wearing, and the fur-lined coat (she 'll be so cold without it), and look, that 's the little chain I gave her on her birthday. She would n't even keep the chain."

"Well, I dare say she would feel rather bad about it after she 's behaved in this way."

"It is n't that. It 's because they were mine — because I wore them." Kitty began to sob.

"No, no, dear Mrs. Tailleur ——"

"Yes, yes. She — she thought they 'd c—c—contaminate her."

Kitty's sobs broke into the shrill laugh of hysteria. Jane led her to the couch and sat beside her. Kitty leaned forward, staring at the floor. Now and then she pressed her handkerchief to her mouth, stifling. Suddenly she looked up into Jane's face.

"Would *you* mind wearing a frock I 'd worn?"

"Of course I would n't."

Kitty's handkerchief dropped on to her lap, a soaked ball, an insufficient dam.

"Oh," she cried, "the beast! — the little, little beast!"

She looked again at Jane, but with a glance half cowed, half candid, like a child that has proved, indubitably, its predestined naughtiness.

"I did n't mean to use that word."

"I want to use it myself," said Jane. "It 's not a bit too much."

"I did n't mean it."

She added softly, reminiscently. "She was such a little thing."

"Much too little for you to care about."

"That 's why I cared. I know it was. She was just like a little, lonely child; and she clung to me at first."

"She certainly seems to have clung."

"That 's why it 's so awful to think that

she could n't bear it — could n't bear to live with me."

"We wondered how you could bear to live with her."

"Did you?"

"Yes. Why did you have her?"

"You see, I had to have some one; and she was nice."

"I don't think she was nice at all."

"Oh yes," said Kitty, solemnly, "you could see *that*."

"I suppose you mean she was a lady?"

"Ye—es." Kitty was not by any means certain that that was what she did mean. It was so difficult to find words for what she meant.

"That," said Jane, "is the least you can be."

"Anyhow, she *was*."

"Well, if you take a charitable view of her. Her people are probably nicer than she is. Perhaps that's why she does n't live with them."

"Her father," said Kitty, "is the vicar of Wenden. I suppose that 's all right."

"Probably; but *we* don't care what peoples' fathers are like, provided they 're nice themselves."

"Do you think I 'm nice?"

Jane laughed. "Yes, as it happens, I do."

"Ah, *you* — *you* ——"

"We both do," said Jane boldly.

"You 're the first nice woman I 've known who has n't been horrid to me. And he ——" Kitty had been playing with a button of her dressing-gown. Her fingers now began tearing, passionately, convulsively, at the button. "He is the first nice man who — who has n't been what men are."

"You don't mean that," said Jane calmly. She was holding Mrs. Tailleur's hand in hers and caressing it, soothing its pathetic violence.

"I do. I do. That 's why I like you so."

"I 'm glad you like us."

"I 'd give anything to know what you really think of me."

"May I say what I think?"

"Yes."

"I think you 're too good to be so unhappy."

"That 's a new view of me. Most people think I'm too unhappy to be very good."

"You *are* good; but if you 'd been happier you 'd have known that other people are what you call good, too."

"That 's what I said to Bunny. *She* was unhappy."

"Never mind her. If you 'd been happier you 'd have known, for instance, that my brother is n't an exception. There are a great many men like him. All the men I 've known have been more or less like Robert."

"They would be, dear; all the men *you 've* known. But, you see, something happened. Nothing ever happened to you."

"No. Nothing very much has happened to me. Nothing very much ever will."

"You never wanted things to happen, did you?"

"I don't know. Perhaps I 'm interested most in the things that happen to other people."

"You dear! If I 'd been like you ——"

"I wish," said Jane, "you 'd known Robert sooner."

Mrs. Tailleur's lips parted, but no voice came through them.

"Then," said Jane, "whatever happened never would have happened, probably."

"I wonder. What do you suppose happened?"

"I don't know. I 've no business to know."

"What do you think? Tell me — tell me!"

"I think you 've been very badly handled."

"Yes. You may think so."

"When you were young — too young to understand it."

"Ah, I was never too young to under-

stand. That 's the difference between you and me."

"That makes it all the worse, then."

"All the worse! So that 's what you think? How does it make you feel to me?"

"It makes me feel that I want to take you away, and warm you and wrap you round, so that nothing could ever touch you and hurt you any more."

"That 's how it makes you feel?"

"That 's how it makes us both feel."

"*He* takes it that way, too?"

"Of course he does. Any nice man would."

"If *I* were nice ——"

"You *are* nice."

"You don't know, my child; you don't know."

"Do you suppose Robert does n't know?"

Mrs. Tailleur rose suddenly and turned away.

"I was nice once," she said, "and at times I can be now."

CHAPTER XI

COLONEL HANKIN was mistaken. Mrs. Tailleur's room was not wanted the next day. The point had been fiercely disputed in those obscure quarters of the hotel inhabited by the management. The manager's wife was for turning Mrs. Tailleur out on the bare suspicion of her impropriety. The idea in the head of the manager's wife was that there should be no suspicion as to the reputation of the Cliff Hotel. The manager, on his side, contended that the Cliff Hotel must not acquire a reputation for suspicion; that any lady whom Miss Lucy had made visibly her friend was herself in the position so desirable for the Cliff Hotel; that, in any case, unless Mrs. Tailleur's conduct became such as to justify an extreme step, the scandal of the ejection would be more damaging to the Cliff Hotel than her present transparently

innocent and peaceful occupation of the best room in it. He wished to know how a scandal was to be avoided when the place was swarming with old women. And, after all, what had they got against Mrs. Tailleur except that she was better looking by a long chalk, and better turned-out, than any of 'em? Of course, he could n't undertake to say — offhand —whether she was or was n't any better than she should be. But, in the absence of complaints, he did n't consider the question a profitable one for a manager to go into in the slack season.

All the manager's intelligence was concentrated in the small commercial eye which winked, absurdly, in the solitude of his solemn and enormous face. You must take people as you found them, said he, and for his part he had always found Mrs. Tailleur ——

But how the manager had found Mrs. Tailleur was never known to his wife, for at this point she walked out of the private

sitting-room and shut herself into her bureau. Her opinion, more private even than that sitting-room, consecrated to intimate dispute, was that where women were concerned the manager was a perfect fool.

The window of the bureau looked out on to the vestibule and the big staircase. And full in sight of the window Mrs. Tailleur was sitting on a seat set under the stair. She had her hat on and carried a sunshade in her hand, for the day was fine and warm. She was waiting for somebody. And as she waited she amused herself by smiling at the little four-year-old son of the management who played in the vestibule, it being the slack season. He was running up and down the flagged floor, dragging a little cart after him. And as he ran he never took his eyes off the pretty lady. They said, every time, with the charming vanity of childhood, "Look at me!" And Kitty looked at him, every time, and made, every time, the right sort of smile that says to a little boy, "I

see you." Just then nobody was there to see Kitty but the manager's wife, who stood at the window of the bureau and saw it all. And as the little boy was not looking in the least where he was going, his feet were presently snared in the rug where the pretty lady sat, and he would have tumbled on his little nose if Kitty had not caught him.

He was going to cry, but Kitty stopped him just in time by lifting him on to her lap and giving him her watch to look at. A marvellous watch that was gold and blue and bordered with a ring of little sparkling stones.

At that moment Robert Lucy came down the stairs. He came very quietly and leaned over the banister behind Kitty's back and watched her, while he listened shamelessly to the conversation. The pretty lady looked prettier than ever.

"My daddy gave my mummy her watch on her birthday," said the little boy. "Who gave you your watch?"

"It was n't your daddy, dear."

"Of course it was n't my daddy."

"Of course not."

"What is your name?"

"My name is Mrs. Tailleur."

"Mrs. Ty-loor. My name is Stanley. That gentleman's name is Mr. Lucy. I like him."

Lucy came down and seated himself beside her. She made him a sign with her mouth. as much as to say she was under a charm and he was n't to break it.

"Do you like him, Mrs. Tyloor?"

"Well — what do you think?"

"I think you like him very much."

Mrs. Tailleur laughed softly.

"What makes you laugh?"

"You. You 're so funny."

"*You 're* funny. Your eyelashes curl up when you laugh, and your eyes curl, too. And your mouth!" he crowed with the joy of it. "Such a funny mouth."

The mouth hid itself in the child's soft neck among his hair. The woman in the

bureau saw that, and her face became curiously contracted.

"I remember the day you came. My daddy said you was very pretty."

"And what did your mummy say?"

Kitty had caught sight of the fierce face in the window, and a little daring devil had entered into her.

"Mummy said she could n't tell if she was n't allowed to look."

"And why," said Lucy, "was n't she allowed to look?"

"Daddy said she was n't to."

"Of course he did," said Lucy. "It 's very rude to look at people."

"Daddy looked. I saw him."

The door of the bureau opened and the manager's wife came out. She had a slight flush on her face and her mouth was tighter than ever.

Mrs. Tailleur saw her coming and slipped the child from her lap. The manager's wife put out her hand to take him, but he turned from her and clung to the pretty lady.

The woman seized him by the arm and tore him from her, and dragged him toward the apartments of the management. The child screamed as he went.

"Women like that," said Lucy, "should n't be allowed to have children."

Mrs. Tailleur turned to him though she had not heard him.

"What have I done? What harm could I do the little thing?"

"What have you done?" It was hard for him to follow the workings of her mind. "You don't mean to say you minded that?"

"Yes, I minded. I minded awfully."

"That dreadful woman?"

"Do you think she really was dreadful?"

"Quite terrible."

"I don't know. I suppose," she said, "they 're all like that. Yet they can't all be dreadful."

Lucy laughed. He could n't see her point. "I don't understand who 'they' are."

"The women who are — the women who 've got children."

She stooped down and picked up something from the floor. It was the little man out of the cart that the child had been playing with, that lay there, smashed, at her feet. The manager's wife had stepped on it. Kitty set the little man upon the seat and smiled at him sadly. And Lucy smiled at her out of a great and sudden tenderness.

He thought he saw it now.

"I think," said he, "you must allow for a little maternal jealousy."

"Jealousy? I can understand jealousy."

"So can I," said Lucy.

"And you think that was jealousy?"

"Well, you know, that little boy was making barefaced love to you."

She laughed. "I suppose," she said, "you *would* feel like that about it."

She got up and they went out, past the hotel front and down the lawn, in sight of the veranda, where at this hour everybody

was there to see them. Lucy meant everybody to see. He had chosen that place, and that hour, also, which wore, appropriately, the innocence of morning. He knew her pitiful belief that he was defying public opinion in being seen with her; but from her ultimate consent, from her continuous trust in him, and from the heartrending way she clung to him, he gathered that she knew him, she knew that defiance, from him, would be a vindication of her.

He did not yet know how dear she had become to him. Only, as he looked at her moving close beside him, so beautiful and so defenceless, he thanked God that he had kept his manhood clean, so that nothing that he did for her could hurt her.

And so, holding himself very upright, and with his head in the air, he went slowly past the veranda and the Hankins, and, turning to Mrs. Tailleur, gave them the full spectacle of his gladness and his pride in her.

"How good you are to me," she said. "I know why you did that."

"Do you?"

He smiled, guarding his secret, holding it back a little while longer.

"Where are we going to?"

"Anywhere you choose to take me."

He took her through the gate that led them to the freedom of the Cliff.

"Do you see that?" He pointed to the path which was now baked hard and white by the sun.

"What is it?"

"Your little footprints, and my great hoofmarks beside them. I believe nobody comes this way but you and me."

"You see, it leads nowhere," said she.

"Does n't it?" said he.

The little room in the Cliff-side was whiter than ever, burning white, it was, where the sun faced it. But the east side of it was in shadow, and they sat there, under the great forehead of the Cliff.

They were both silent. Lucy was thinking of how he had found her there, and of the fear and trouble of last night. He vowed that if he could help it there should be no more fear and no more trouble for her. In their silence, voices thin and sweet with distance, came to them from below, where children played on the beach among the rocks that, washed by water-springs from the Cliff's forehead to its foot, lay heaped where they had fallen. She listened and laughed.

She was happy now. He watched her as she stretched her adorable feet to the sun. A little wind came from the sea and played with her, taking from her a slight scent of violets for its salt. Every nerve in his body was aware of her nearness.

Only last night he had seen her crouching just there, in the darkness, convulsed, her face wet with rain and tears. It was good that the place they had chosen should be changed and cleansed for them by sunlight and wind

from the sea and the sweet voices of children.

She did not break the silence. She only looked at him once with eyes whose pupils, black and dilated, narrowed the blue ring of the iris.

Then he spoke. "I was going to say something to you last night, but I did n't. There was something I wanted to know first, something I was n't quite sure about."

She turned her face from him. The light struck it, and it quivered and grew white.

"Well, do you know now?"

"Yes," he said, "I know now."

But her lips scarcely moved as she answered him. "Of course you know."

She faced him with her sad white courage.

"Everybody knows. I 'd rather you knew. I — I meant you to."

"Oh please" — he protested. "I wonder if I may say what it is?"

"It 's something about me?"

"Yes. It 's something about you. If I may say it."

"You may say anything you please. You know that."

"Well, I wanted very much to know whether — whether you were fond of children."

"Oh ——" She drew a long breath, as if released from torture. Then she laughed the indescribable half-sobbing laugh of a child tormented and suddenly set free.

"Whether I were fond of children. Do you honestly mean it? Was that what you were n't sure of?"

"Well, of course, in a way I knew — but I could n't tell, you know, till I 'd seen you with one."

"Well, and so you can tell now?"

"Yes. I can tell now."

"And if I am fond of children, what difference does that make?"

"It makes all the difference. You see, I 've got two little girls ——"

"Two little girls." She repeated it after him smiling, as if she played with the vision of them.

"You see — they 've no mother. My wife ——"

"I know," she said softly.

"How did you know?"

"I can't tell you."

"My wife died five years ago when my youngest little girl was born."

"And I thought," she said, "you were so young."

"I 'm thirty-five."

"Still I was right. You 're young. Very young."

"Oh, well, don't you know, they say a woman 's as young as she looks, and a man 's as young as he feels. I *feel* all right."

"You dear." Her mouth and eyes said it without a sound.

"Are you quite sure that 's all you want to know?"

"I had to know it."

"It was so important?"

"Yes. Because of *them*."

"And now you know all about me?"

"Yes. Now I know all about you."

"Don't you want to know something about — about Mr. Tailleur?"

Lucy's face hardened. "No, I don't think I want to know anything about him."

He had made up his mind that Mr. Tailleur had been a brute to her.

"He *is* dead."

"Well, yes. I supposed he would be."

"He died four years ago. I was married very young."

"I supposed that too."

"You don't feel that he's important?"

"Not in the very least."

She laughed.

"When I said that I knew all about you, I only meant that I knew — I 'd the sense to see — what you were. You must n't think that I take anything for granted."

"Ah, Mr. Lucy, dear, I 'm afraid you 're taking everything for granted."

"On my soul I 'm not. I 'm not that sort. There 's one thing about you I don't know yet, and I 'm afraid to ask, and it 's the only thing I really want to know. It 's the only thing that matters."

"Then ask me, ask me straight, whatever it is, and let 's get it over. Can't you trust me to tell you the truth?"

"I trust you — to tell me the truth. I want to know where I am — where we are."

"Is it for me to say?"

"It 's for you to say whether you think you can ever care for me."

"Can 't you see that I care for you?"

"No, I 'd give anything to see."

"Ah, it 's so like you not to. And I thought I 'd shown you — everything."

"You have n't shown me yet whether you care enough to — to ——"

He checked himself, while his love for her drew its first breath, as if it had been born but that instant, in an agony of desire and fear.

"To do what?" she said. "Why won't you tell me?"

"I 'm afraid," he said simply.

"Afraid of *me* Why should you be?"

"Because, if you really cared for me, I think you 'd know what I want."

"It 's because I care so much that I don't know. Unless you tell me."

She put her small fingers lightly on the sleeve of his coat; they slid till they found his hands that hung clenched before him.

At her touch he trembled.

"Don't you know," she said, "that there's nothing I would n't do for you? Tell me what you want me to do."

He spoke so low that she strained to hear him.

"To marry me — to be my wife."

Her hand still lay on his, but she herself seemed to draw back and pause."

"Your wife?" she said at last. "My dear, you 've only known me ten days."

"It makes no difference."

He took her hand in his and kissed it, bowing his head.

She twisted herself away from him, and drew back her face from his. They rose.

"Ah," she said, "you 're cold. You don't know how. Let me look at you. It 's not me you want. You want a mother for your children."

"Not I. I want you — you — for myself."

She moved toward him with a low cry, and he took her in his arms and stood still by her without a word. And to his joy, she whom he held (gently, lest he should hurt her) laid her face to his face, and held him with a grip tighter than his own, as if she feared that he would loose himself and leave her. Her eyes closed as he kissed her forehead, and opened as her mouth found his.

Then she drew herself slowly from him.

"You love me then?" she said.

"Yes, Kitty, I love you."

CHAPTER XII

THE awkward thing was telling Jane about it. Jane had been his dead wife's friend before he married her, and she had known her better then than she knew Kitty. Yet he remembered, acutely, how he had gone to her eight years ago, and told her that he was going to marry Amy, and how she had kissed him and said nothing, and how, when he asked her if she had any objection, she had said "No, none. But is n't it a little sudden?"

He wondered how Jane would look when he told her he was going to marry Kitty. That was bound to strike her as very sudden indeed.

It was wonderful to him that this thing should have happened to him. He was aware that it was a new thing. Nothing in his previous experience had prepared him for it. He had been very young eight years

ago, and a gayer, lighter-hearted chivalry had gone to his courtship of poor Amy, Poor Amy, though he would not own it, had been a rather ineffectual woman, with a prodigious opinion of her small self and a fretting passion for dominion. She had had a crowd of friends and relations whom she had allowed to come between them. Poor Amy had never understood him. There were heights and depths in him to which she had made no appeal.

But Kitty — she had brought something out of him that had been hidden and unknown to him before. Something that answered to the fear with which she had drawn back from him and to the tremendous and tragic passion with which she had given herself to him at the last. Poor little Amy had never held him so. She had never loved him like that in all her poor little life. And so his very tenderness for Kitty had terror in it, lest he should fail her, lest he should in any way justify her prescience of disaster.

Somebody was coming along the Cliff-path, somebody with a telegram for Mrs. Tailleur. She rose, moving away from Lucy as she opened it.

"There is no answer," she said. And she came to him again and sat beside him, very still, with hands spread over the telegram that lay open in her lap.

"Has anything happened?"

She shook her head. He took the hand that she held out to him by way of reassurance and possession.

"Then why do you look like that?"

She smiled.

"Kitty — that was an unconvincing smile."

"Was it? I 'm sorry to say there 's a tiresome man coming to see me."

"Say you can't see him. Send him a wire."

"I must. He 's coming on business. I don't *want* to see him."

"Can't I see him for you, if you feel like that?"

"No, dear. He must see me."

"When is he due?"

"At seven-thirty."

"Oh — only in the evening. How long do you think he 'll stay?"

Kitty hardened her face. "Not a minute longer than I can help."

"An hour? Two hours?"

"I shall have to give him dinner. He 's — he 's that sort of man."

"Two hours, probably. I think I 'll take Janey for a stroll while he 's here. You see, I 've got to tell her, and I shall tell her then."

She put her hands on his shoulders. "And what will — Janey — say?"

"She 'll say she 's glad I 'm going to be happy."

He became thoughtful. "And there are the children," he said. "I 've got to tell them, too."

She was silent. She did not ask him as he had half expected, "What will *they* say?"

"I think," he said, "I 'd better send for them and let them stay here a bit. Could

you stand another week of Southbourne? You said you hated it."

"Yes. I hated it. I should n't have stayed if it had n't been for you."

"Do you mind staying a little longer now?"

"I don't mind staying anywhere where you are."

"Well — just a little longer."

She saw the workings of his mind. The people here had been saying awful things about her. If he took her away they would continue to say them. He could n't stop them. He could n't for instance, go up to Colonel Hankin before leaving, and tell him that he lied, and that Mrs. Tailleur, though appearances might be against her, was as innocent a lady as Mrs. Hankin. He could n't even announce his engagement to her by way of accounting for their simultaneous departure. They were not accountable to these people. But, if they stayed on as if nothing had happened, he could demonstrate to everybody's satisfaction that

he had no other intention with regard to Mrs. Tailleur than to make her his wife and a mother to his children. That was why he was sending for them. Evidently the idea he had — poor lamb — was that he could shelter her innocence with theirs.

And so she told him that she adored Southbourne now and did n't care how long they stopped there.

Lucy's idea had really gone more or less on those lines, though they remained rather more obscure to him than they were to Kitty.

His scheme was so far successful that there were people in the Cliff Hotel who knew about his engagement before Jane did.

It was clear to the management, at any rate, that some consecrating seal had been set to the very interesting relations of Mrs. Tailleur and Mr. Lucy. The manager was more inclined than ever to take a favourable view of Mrs. Tailleur. To begin with, Mrs. Tailleur had ordered a private sitting-room. Then Mr. Lucy presented himself

at the bureau with Mrs. Tailleur and inquired whether he could have a room for his two little girls and their nurse. The manager's wife looked dubious. The best rooms, she said, were taken. And Mrs. Tailleur said, looking at Mr. Lucy, "How about poor Bunny's room? The one leading out of mine?"

A fine flush appeared on Mr. Lucy's face as he said he would have that room.

He then announced that he would wire for the little girls to come at once, and that they would arrive at four o'clock to-morrow. It was further arranged that they were to have their meals in Mrs. Tailleur's private sitting-room. And please, there was to be lots of jam for tea, Mrs. Tailleur said. The manager's wife looked humble before her lord as she booked that order.

That was at twelve o'clock of the tenth day.

Seven hours later Mrs. Tailleur was alone in her private sitting-room, preparing with some agitation for the appointment that she had.

CHAPTER XIII

HER tense, flushed mind recorded automatically, and with acute vividness, every detail of the room; the pattern of the gray French wall-paper, with the watered stripe, and of the hot, velvet upholstery, buff on a crimson ground; the architecture of the stained walnut sideboard and overmantel, with their ridiculous pediments and little shelves and bevelled mirrors; the tapestry curtains, the palms in shining turquoise blue pots, and the engraved picture of Grace Darling over the sideboard.

It was absolutely necessary that she should have this place to see him in, without Robert seeing him. Beyond that immediate purpose she discerned its use as a play-room for Robert's children.

To-morrow, at four o clock, she would be waiting there for them. They had settled

that, she and Robert. She was to have everything ready, and the table laid for tea, To-morrow they would all be sitting there, round the table. To-morrow she would see Robert's children, and hold them in her arms.

Her heart gave a sudden leap, as if something had quickened in it. Her brain glowed. Her pulses throbbed with the race of the glad blood in her veins. Her whole being moved, trembling and yearning, toward an incredible joy. Till that moment she had hardly realised Robert's children. A strange unquietness, not yet recognised as fear, had kept her from asking him many questions about them. Even now, their forms were like the forms of children seen in the twilight of dreams, the dreams of women who have never had children; forms that hover and torture and pursue; that hide their faces, half seen; that will not come to the call, nor be held by the hand, nor gathered to the heart.

That she should really see them, and hear their voices, and hold them in her arms, to-morrow, seemed to her a thing impossible, beyond credibility or dream. Then she said to herself that it all depended on what happened between to-morrow and to-day.

It was not long past seven and she had still a good twenty minutes before her. She spent it in pacing up and down the room, and looking at the clock every time she turned and confronted it. At the half-hour she arrangd herself on the sofa, with a book, in an attitude of carelessness as to the event. As a material appearance the attitude was perfect.

She rose as the servant announced "Mr. Wilfrid Marston." She stood as she had risen, waiting for her visitor to advance. Her eyes were fixed on her book which she laid down, deliberately marking the page, and yet she was aware of his little pause at the door as it closed behind him, and of

his little smile that took her in. She had no need to look at him.

He was a man of middle size, who held himself so well that he appeared taller and slenderer than he was. You saw that he had been fair and florid and slender enough in his youth, and that all his good points had worn somewhat to hardness. His face was hard and of a fast-hardening, reddish-sallow colour, showing a light network of veins about the cheekbones. Hard, wiry wrinkles were about the outer corners of his eyes. He kept his small reddish-gold moustache close clipped, so that it made his mouth look extraordinarily straight and hard. People who did n't know him were apt to mistake him for a soldier. (He was in the War Office, rather high up.) He had several manners, his official manner to persons calling at the War Office; his social manner, inimitably devout to women whom he respected; and his natural manner, known only in its perfection to women whom he did not respect.

And under both of these he conveyed a curious and disagreeable impression of stern sensuality, as if the animal in him had worn to hardness, too.

"Kitty, my dear girl!" His voice, unlike the rest of him, could be thick and soft and fluid. He put his arm round her, and she offered him her mouth, curled forward, obedient but unsmiling. Her hand, surrendered to his, lay limp in the hard clasp of it. He raised it as if weighing the powerless, subservient thing.

"Kitty," he said, "you 're still getting thin. My last orders were, if you remember, that you were to put on another stone before I saw you again."

He bared her wrist, pressing it slightly, to show how its round curves were sunken.

"Do you call that putting on another stone?"

She drew back her arm.

"What have you been doing to yourself?" he said.

"Nothing. There has n't been anything

to do. It 's not very amusing being left all by yourself for weeks and weeks, you know."

"All by yourself?"

"Yes. Bunny does n't count."

"No, she certainly does n't. Poor Kitten, you must have been very badly bored."

He looked round the room.

"Do they do you well at this place?"

"It is n't *very* comfortable. I think you 'd be better off at the Métropole."

"What possessed you to stay at the place if you 're not comfortable?"

"Well, you see, I did n't expect you for another week."

"What 's that got to do with it?"

"I mean it did well enough for Bunny and me."

"Where is that woman?"

"She 's gone. She left yesterday."

"Why?"

"Well, you know, Wilfrid, Bunny was very respectable."

He laughed. "It 's just as well she went, then, before I came, is n't it? I say, what have you done to your eyes? They used to be black, now they 're blue. Bright blue."

There was a look in them he did not understand.

"I think," she said, "you would be much more comfortable at the Métropole."

"Oh no; I 'll try this place for one night." She veiled her eyes.

"We can move on if I can't stand it. When are we going to dine?"

"At eight. It 's twenty to, now. You 'd like it up here, would n't you?"

"Rather. I say, where 's my room?"

She flushed and turned from him with an unaccountable emotion.

"I — I don't know."

"Did n't you order one for me?"

"No; I don't think I did."

"I suppose I can get one, can't I?"

"I suppose so. But don't you think

you 'd better go over to the Métropole? You see, this is a very small hotel."

He looked at her sharply.

"I don't care how small it is."

He summoned a waiter and inquired irascibly for his room.

Kitty was relieved when the room was got for him, because he went to it instantly, and that gave her time. She said to herself that it would be all right if she could be alone for a minute or two and could think. She thought continuously through the act of dressing, and in the moment of waiting till he appeared again. He would be hungry, and his first thought would be for his dinner.

It was. But his second thought was for Kitty, who refused to eat.

"What 's the matter with you?"

"Nothing. I 've got a headache."

Again he looked sharply at her.

"A headache, have you? It 'll be better if you eat something."

But Kitty shook her head.

"What 's the good of my sending you to Matlock and those places if you come back in this state? You know, if you once get really thin, Kitty, you 're done for."

"Am I?" Her mouth trembled, not grossly, but with a small, fine quiver of the upper lip. The man had trained her well. She knew better than to cry before him.

The slender sign of emotion touched him, since it was not disfiguring.

"How long have you been starving yourself?" he asked more gently.

"I 've not been starving myself. I 've got a headache."

He poured out some wine for her.

"You must either eat *or* drink."

"I don't want any."

"Nonsense."

"I — I can't. I feel sick."

He raised his eyebrows.

"Need you mention it?"

"I would n't if you had n't teased me so."

"I beg your pardon."

She began playing with some salted almonds.

"My *dear* girl, I would n't eat those things if I were you."

"I 'm not eating them." She pushed the dish from her. "I 'm afraid," said she, "it is n't a very nice dinner."

He was looking at the *entrée* with interest and a slight suspicion.

"What is this?"

"Curried chicken."

"Oh." He helped himself fastidiously to curried chicken, tasted it with delicate deliberation, and left it on his plate.

"You are wise," said he. "There is a certain crude, unsatisfying simplicity about this repast."

"Did n't I tell you?"

"You did."

"You see now why I said you 'd better go to the Métropole?"

"I do indeed."

An admirable joint of mutton, cheese, coffee and a liqueur effaced the painful impres-

sion made by the *entrée*. By nine o'clock Marston declared himself inured to the hardships of the Cliff Hotel.

"How long can you stay?" she asked. The question had been burning in her for two hours.

"Well, over the week end, I think."

Her heart, that had fluttered like a bird, sank, as a bird sinks in terror with wings tight shut.

"Have you got to go up to town to-morrow?"

"I have, worse luck. How do the trains go from this godforsaken place?"

"About every two hours. What sort of train do you want? An early one?"

"Rather. Got to be at Whitehall by twelve."

"Will the nine-fifteen do?"

"Yes; that's all right."

The wings of her heart loosened. It rose light, as if air, not blood, flowed from its chambers.

The Lucys were never by any chance down before nine. Robert would not meet him.

He sat down in the chair opposite her, with his eyes fixed on her as she leaned back in the corner of the sofa. He settled himself in comfort, crossing his legs and thrusting out one foot, defined under a delicate silk sock, in an attitude that was almost contemptuous of Kitty's presence.

Kitty's face was innocent of any perception of these shades. He drew the long breath of ease and smiled at her again, a smile that intimated how thoroughly he approved of her personal appearance.

"Ye — es," he said, "you 're different, but I think you 're almost as pretty as you were."

"Am I?" she said. "What did you expect?"

"I did n't expect anything. I never do. It 's my scheme for avoiding disappointment. Is your head better?"

"No; it 's aching abominably."

"Sorry. But it 's rather hard lines for me, is n't is? I wish you *could* have chosen some other time to be ill in."

"What does it matter whether I 'm ill or not, if I 'm not pretty?"

He smiled again.

"I don't mean, child, that you 're ever not pretty."

"Thank you. I know exactly how pretty I am."

"Do you? How pretty do you think you are now?"

"Not half as pretty as Dora Nicholson. You know exactly how pretty she is."

"I do. And I know exactly how pretty she 'll be in five years' time. That 's the worst of those thin women with little, delicate, pink faces. You know the precise minute when a girl like Dora 'll go off. You know the pinkness will begin to run when she 's once past thirty. You can see the crows' feet coming, and you know exactly how far they 'll have got by the time she's thirty-

five. You know that when she 's forty there 'll be two little lines like thumb-nail marks beside her ears, just here, and you know that when she 's forty-five the dear little lobes will begin to shrivel up, and that when she 's fifty the corners of her mouth will collapse."

"And then?"

"Then, if you 're a wise man you don't know any more."

"Poor little Dora. You *are* a brute, Wilfrid."

"I 'm not a brute. I was going to say that the best of you, dear, is that I don't know how you 'll look at fifty. I don't know how you 'll look to-morrow — to-night. You 're never the same for ten minutes together. When you get one of those abominable headaches you look perhaps as old as you are. You 're twenty-seven, are n't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, I dare say you 'll look twenty-seven

when you are fifty. There 's something awfully nice about that sort of prettiness. It leaves things delightfully vague. I can't *see* you fifty."

"Perhaps I never shall be."

"Perhaps not. That 's just it. You leave it open to me to think so. I don't seriously contemplate your ever being forty. In fact your being thirty is one of those melancholy and disastrous events that need not actually occur. It 's very tactful of you, Kitty."

"All the same, I 'm not as pretty as Dora Nicholson."

"Dora Nicholson!"

"You can't say she is n't awfully pretty."

"I don't say it." His voice rose to an excited falsetto. "She *is* awfully pretty — extravagantly, preposterously pretty. And she 'll have to pay for it."

"Oh — we all have to pay for it."

"Sooner *or* later."

"Poor Dora ——"

"Poor Dora. Perhaps we have been rather

brutal to her. She 's good for another five years."

"Only five years? And what will she do then?"

"Oh, she 'll be all right. She 'll rouge a bit, and powder a bit, and dress like anything. You need n't be unhappy about Dora. I can tell you Dora is n't going to be unhappy about you. Unhappiness would be extremely unbecoming to her, and she knows it. It is n't particularly becoming to any woman. You would be less damaged by it than most perhaps."

"You 've never seen me unhappy."

"I hope to God I never shall."

"You need n't be afraid, Wilfrid, you never will."

"I wish," she said presently, "I wish you liked Dora Nicholson."

"I do like her."

"I wish you liked her as much as me."

"That 's very noble of you, Kitty. But may I ask, why?"

"Because it would make things simpler."

"Simpler? I should have said myself that that was just where complications might occur. Supposing I liked Dolly better than you, what then?"

"Oh, that would make it simpler still."

"It certainly would be simpler than the other situation you suggest."

"It would for both of us."

"But why this sudden yearning for simplicity? And why Dora Nicholson?"

"There is n't any why. Anybody else would do, provided you liked them better than me. It 's only a question of time, you know. You 're bound to tire of me sooner or later."

"Later, Kitty, later. Barring jealousy. If you 're going in for that, I may as well tell you at once that I shall tire of it very soon."

"You think that 's what 's the matter with me?"

"Well, something 's the matter with you,

I suppose it 's that. I should drop it, Kitty. It really is n't worth while. It only makes you thin, and — and I can't be bored with it, d' you see?"

"I don't want — to be bored — with it — either." She spoke very slowly. "If you wanted to leave me for Dora Nicholson, I should be a fool to try and keep you, should n't I?"

"Well — you 're not a fool."

"You 're not a fool either, Wilfrid."

"If I am I take some pains to conceal it."

"If a woman wanted to leave you for another man, would you try and keep her?"

He looked at her attentively. "It depends on the woman, and on some other things besides. For instance, if I were married to her, I might make a considerable effort, not to keep *her*, but — to keep up appearances."

"And if — you were not married to her?"

"There again it would depend on the

woman. I might take it that she 'd left me already."

"Yes, but if you knew she was n't that sort — if you knew she 'd always been straight with you?"

"Well, then perhaps I might take the trouble to find out whether there really was another man. Or I might have reason to suppose she was only trying it on. In which case I should say to her 'My dear Kitty, you 're a very clever woman and it 's a brilliant idea you 've got. But it 's been tried before and it won't work. You can't draw me that way.'"

"But, Wilfrid — if there *was* another man?"

"Well, it 's possible that I might not consider it worth while to dispute his claim. That would depend altogether on the woman."

"If you cared for her?"

"If I cared enough for her I might be able to convince her that it would at any

rate be prudent, from a worldly point of view, to stick to me. But *that* would depend, would n't it, on the amount of the other fellow's income?"

"And if all that did n't matter in the very least to her, if she did n't care a rap about anybody's income, if she cared for the other fellow more than she 'd ever cared for you, if she did n't care for your caring, if she cared for nothing except *his* caring, and nothing you could do could move her — what would you do then?"

He paused to light another cigarette before he answered her. "I should probably tell her, first of all, that for all I cared she might go to the devil, I mean to the other fellow, and stay there as long as he wanted her."

"Well" — she said placably.

"That 's what I should say first. Afterward, when we were both a little calmer — if I cared for her, Kitty — I should ask her to think a moment before she did anything

rash, to be quite sure that she would really he happier with the other fellow. And I should point out to her very clearly that, in any case, if she once went, it would not be open to her to come back."

"But you would n't try and keep her?"

"I could n't keep her, my dear child, by trying."

"No — you could n't keep her. Not for yourself. But, if you could keep her from the other man, would you?"

"I dare say I should do my best."

"Would you do your worst? No, Wilfrid, you 've been very good to me — I don't believe you 'd do your worst."

"What do you mean," he said sharply.

"You would n't tell him what she was, what she had been — if he did n't know it. Would you?"

He was silent.

"Would you?" she cried.

"No, Kitty, I would n't do that. I'm not a cad."

He pondered.

"But my dear girl, do you suppose for a moment that he does n't know?"

"He does n't know a thing."

"Then what in heaven's name are you talking about?"

"I 'm trying to tell you. It is n't what you think. I — I 'm going to be married."

Marston took his cigarette out of his mouth, and stared at it. There was no expression in his face beyond that concentrated, attentive stare.

"Good Lord. Why," he said, "could n't you tell me that before I came down?"

"I was going to. I was going to write to you and ask you not to come."

"*Good* God."

He said it softly, and with calm incredulity rather than amazement.

"Who is it, Kitty? Do I know him?"

"No."

"Do you know him yourself?"

She smiled. "Yes I know him."

"Well — but how long?"

"Ten days."

"You met him here? In this hotel?"

"Yes."

"That 's why you were so anxious for me to go to the Métropole, was it?"

"Yes."

"Look here. I don't want to be unkind, but it does n't do to blink facts. Are you quite sure he means to marry you?"

"Why should n't he?"

"Well, these marriages do happen, but — I don't want to be unkind again — but you know they are, to say the least of it, a little unusual."

"Yes."

"You 've seen some of them?"

"Yes."

"And you know, you know as well as I do, the sort of man who — who ——"

"Who marries the sort of woman I am? Yes, I know him, perfectly well. He 's horrible."

"There are exceptions, but he 's generally pretty bad. You think he 's horrible. You 'll be miserable when you find yourself tied to him for life. You see, however awful he was, you would n't be exactly in a position to get rid of him."

"Wilfrid," her voice was very low and tender, "he is n't like that. He 's good ——"

"Good, is he?" He laughed.

"Oh, don't laugh. He *is* good."

"Well, I don't say he is n't — only ——" he smiled.

"You forget," she said. "He does n't know."

"Are you quite sure he does n't know?"

"Quite — quite sure."

"And you are not going to enlighten him?"

She drew back before his penetrating gaze. "I can't. I could n't bear him to know."

"How do you propose to prevent his knowing? Do you think you 're clever enough to keep him in the dark for ever?"

"Why not? He has n't seen things in the broad daylight, under his very nose. There were plenty of things to see."

"You mean he 's stupid?"

"I mean I have n't been clever, if that 's what you think. Once I did nearly tell him."

"Supposing somebody else tells him?"

"If they do it 'll only be their word against mine. And he 'd take my word against anybody's."

"Poor devil!"

He seemed to meditate, dispassionately, on the poor devil's case, and hers.

"You little fool. It is n't a question of people's words. How are you going to get rid of the facts?"

"He need n't know them."

"You forget. I 'm one of them. How are you going to get rid of me?"

"Oh, Wilfrid — you 're not going to tell him? You said you would n't."

"Of course I said I would n't — I 'd even be glad to get rid of myself to oblige you,

Kitty, but I can't. Here I am. How are you going to account for me?"

"I 've thought of that. He need n't see you. It 'll be all right, Wilfrid, if you 'll go away."

"No doubt. But I have n't gone away."

He emphasised his point by rising and taking up a commanding position on the hearthrug.

Some one knocked at the door, and she started violently.

It was only a servant, bringing a note for her.

She read it and handed it to Marston, looking piteously at him as he stood his ground.

"Mr. Lucy can come up," she said. "We have finished all we had to say."

"I think there are one or two points," he replied, "still unsettled."

She turned to the servant.

"Will you tell Mr. Lucy I 'm engaged for the present. I will see him later."

"No, my dear Mrs. Tailleur, not on my account. There 's no reason why you should n't see Mr. Lucy now. No reason at all."

She stood tortured with indecision.

"Mrs. Tailleur will see Mr. Lucy now."

"I will see him in ten minutes."

"Very good, ma'am."

The servant withdrew.

Marston shrugged his shoulders.

"There you are. Here we both are. Here we are all three in the same hotel. An uncomfortably small hotel. How are you — or rather, how is he — going to get over that?"

"It would be all right if you 'd only go. I 've told him you were a man coming on business."

"My dear Kitty, that was quite unworthy of you."

"Well, what could I do? It 's not as if I was in the habit of telling lies."

"I won't criticise it if it was a first

attempt. But in telling a lie, my child, it 's as well to select one that bears some resemblance to the truth. Do I look like a man who comes on business?"

"You will go before he comes, won't you?"

"No, I don't think I will."

"You have nothing," she said, "to gain by staying."

"I suppose you think you have everything to gain by my going?"

"Oh, Wilfrid, give me my chance."

"I 'm giving you your chance, you little fool. I would n't produce that pocket-handkerchief if I were you. It 's quite the most damaging thing about you."

She gave a hysterical laugh, and put the pocket-handkerchief away.

"You are utterly unfit," he commented, "to manage your own affairs."

They sat silent, while the clock ticked out the last minutes of her torture.

"You 'd better make up your mind what

you 're going to do when he arrives," he said finally.

"I don't know," said Kitty, "what I 'm going to do."

"I 'll tell you, then. You are going to introduce me as you would any ordinary man of your acquaintance."

"By your own name?"

"By my own name, of course."

They waited. Lucy's stride was heard along the corridor. She looked up at her tormentor.

"Is my nose red, Wilfrid?"

"No," he said, smiling grimly, "my dear Mrs. Tailleur," he added as Lucy entered.

CHAPTER XIV

SHE came to meet him, keeping her back to Marston, her face thrust a little forward in the way it had, looking for the protection of Robert's kind eyes. Only when she had his hand in hers she turned.

"May I introduce Mr. Wilfrid Marston?"

The two men bowed, glancing at each other with eyes urbanely innocent of curiosity.

"I 'm sorry to have had to keep you waiting," said Kitty.

"So am I," said Marston. "Our business took rather longer than we thought."

"Business generally does," said Lucy.

"It need not have taken quite so long if I could have persuaded Mrs. Tailleur to think a little of her own advantage."

"I have," said Kitty, "an admirable adviser in Mr. Marston."

"You are always kind. Even if you don't always act on my advice."

"Sometimes you think you know your own affairs best."

"And sometimes," said Lucy, "it 's just possible you do."

"Sometimes. I 've been telling Mrs. Tailleur that she's incapable of managing her own affairs when it 's a question of her own advantage. If you know anything of Mrs. Tailleur, you will agree with me there."

"I certainly agree with you, if Mrs. Tailleur will forgive my saying so. I hope I 've not come too soon."

"Oh, no. Mr. Marston has missed the last train up."

"And Mrs. Tailleur has been kind enough to ask me to stop the night."

"If you don't prefer the Métropole. Mr. Lucy is not going. Don't — it 's all right, Robert."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. Our business is finished."

"All except one or two details which we may perhaps arrange later," said Marston, who preserved a perfect suavity.

"How much later?" said Kitty. "*I 'm* not going to arrange anything more to-night."

"To-morrow night."

"There won't be any to-morrow night — if you 're going up to town."

"Well, then, perhaps if Mr. Lucy will excuse us, you will give me a moment now. It seems a pity not to put things straight while you 're about it."

"You can 't put things straight at eleven o'clock at night. My poor head 's all muddled and aching abominably."

"To-morrow morning, then."

"There will be no time to-morrow morning. Robert, has Jane gone to bed?"

"No, she 's sitting up. She wants to speak to you."

"Will you bring her to me, please?"

He rose. When he had left the room she turned on Marston in a fury.

"Wilfrid, you 're a beast, a perfect beast."

"A man of business, my dear Kitty, very often is. He 's paid, you know, for doing beastly things."

"They come easy to you."

"Is that all the thanks I get for playing up to you? I gave you every point, too."

She raged dumbly.

"I can't congratulate you on your skill in the game. You 'd have given yourself away ten times over — if I had n't stopped you."

"What are you waiting for now, then?"

"I have not said good night to your friend Mr. Lucy, nor to you."

"You can say good night to me now, and good bye. I shall not see you again."

"Pardon me, you will see me to-morrow morning."

"No. Never again. I 've done with you."

"My dear girl, you are absurd. Mr. Lucy is not going to marry you to-morrow morning, is he?"

"Well?"

"And until he marries you, you have n't exactly done with me."

"I see. You want to remind me that the clothes on my back belong to you."

He flushed painfully.

"I don't want to remind you of anything that may be unpleasant to you. I 'm only suggesting that in the circumstances — until you marry him — you can hardly refuse to see me."

"Why should I see you? It 'll make no difference."

"To me, none. To you it may possibly make a considerable difference. There are some points you have evidently not thought of, which it would be well for us to talk over before you think of marrying."

She capitulated.

"If I see you to-morrow, will you go now?"

"I will go, my dear Kitty, the precise moment I see fit. If I were you I should wipe that expression from my face before Mr. Lucy comes in. He might not like it.

The pocket-handkerchief might be used with advantage now — just there."

In obedience to his indication she passed her hand over the flushed tear-stain. At that moment Lucy entered with his sister.

Jane, less guarded than her brother, looked candidly, steadily at Marston, whose face instantly composed itself to reverence and devotion before her young half-spiritual presence.

Kitty's voice was scarcely audible as she murmured the ritual of introduction.

Lucy was aware of her emotion.

"I think," said he, "as Mrs. Tailleur has owned to a bad headache, Mr. Marston and I had better say good night."

Marston said it. There was nothing else left for him to say. And as he went through the door that Lucy opened for him, he cursed him in his heart.

"Jane," said Kitty.

But Jane was looking at the door through which Marston and Robert had just gone.

"Robert did that very neatly," said she. "You wanted to get rid of him, did n't you, Kitty?"

"I 've been trying to get rid of Wilfrid Marston for the last three weeks."

She had such wisdom, mothered by fierce necessity, as comes to the foolish at their call. She was standing over little Jane as she spoke, looking down into her pure, uplifted eyes.

"You 've been crying," she said.

"Yes." Jane's eyes were very bright, new-washed with tears.

"I know why. It 's because of me."

"Yes; but it 's all right now, Kitty."

She did not tell her that ten minutes ago she, too, had been out on the Cliff-side and had had a battle with herself there, and had won it. For little Jane there could n't be a harder thing in the world than to give Robert up. Of course she had to do it, so there could be no virtue in that. The hard thing was to do it gracefully, beautifully.

"What are you going to say to me, Janey? He told you?"

"Yes; he told me."

"Oh, don't look at me like that, dear. Say if you hate it for him."

"I don't hate it. Only, oh, Kitty, dear, do you really love him?"

"Yes; I love him."

"But — you 've only known him ten days. I don't think I could love a man I 'd only known ten days."

"It makes no difference."

"That 's what Robert said."

"Yes; he said it to me. Ah, I know what you mean. You think it 's all very well for him, because men are different. It 's me you can't understand; you think I must be horrid."

"Oh no, no. It 's only — I think *I 'm* different, that 's all."

"*Is* that all, Janey?"

"Yes."

"And will you love me a little if I love

him a great deal? Or do you hate me for loving him?"

"Kitty — you need n't be afraid. The more you love him the more I shall love you."

"Did — did his wife love him? Oh, ought I to have asked you that?"

Jane shook her head.

"I 'm not sure that I ought to tell you."

"She did n't, then?"

"Oh yes, she did, poor little thing. She loved him all she could."

"And it was n't enough?"

"No, I don't think it was, quite. There was something wanting. But I don't think Robert ever knew it."

"He knows it now," said Kitty. Her voice lifted with the pride of passion.

CHAPTER XV

MARSTON cancelled that appointment at Whitehall. Somebody else's business would have to wait another day, that was all. He was wont to settle affairs as they arose, methodically, punctually, in the order of their importance. At the moment his own affair and Kitty's was of supreme importance. Until it was settled he could not attend to anybody else.

He was determined not to let her go. He meant to have her. He did not yet know precisely how he was to achieve this end, but as a first step to it he engaged a room indefinitely at the Métropole. There was nothing like being on the spot. He would consider himself defeated when Lucy had actually married her. Meanwhile, he was uplifted by his supreme distrust of the event.

His rival had made a very favourable

impression on him, with the curious effect of heightening Kitty's value in his eyes. Other causes contributed, her passion for Lucy, and the subtle purification it had wrought in her (a charm to which Marston was by no means unsusceptible), the very fact that his own dominion was uncertain and his possession incomplete.

Up till now he had been unaware of the grip she had on him. He had never allowed for the possibility of permanence in his relations with her sex. The idea of marriage was peculiarly unsupportable to him. Even in his youth he had had no love affairs, avowed and sanctioned. Though Marston professed the utmost devotion to women like Miss Lucy, the women whom his mother and his sisters knew, he had noticed a little sadly that he soon wearied of their society, that he had no power of sustained communion with the good. The unfallen were for him the unapproachable. Therefore he had gravitated by taste and tempera-

ment to the women of the underworld. There his incurable fastidiousness drove him to the pursuit of a possible perfection, distinction within the limits, the inherent frailties of the type.

In Kitty Tailleur he had found even more than he was looking for. Kitty had certain graces, reminiscent of the upper world; a heritage from presumably irreproachable parents, that marked her from the women of her class. She had, moreover, a way of her own, different from the charm of the unfallen, different, too, from the coarse lures of the underworld. Kitty was never rank, never insipid. She had a few light brains in her body, and knew how to use them, woman-like, for the heightening of her charm.

There were other good points about Kitty. Marston disliked parting with his money, and he had found Kitty, so far, inexpensive, as women went.

For these reasons, so many and so plausible that they disguised the true kind and degree

of his subjection, he had before now returned to Kitty more than once after he thought that he had tired of her.

Only three weeks ago, on her return from Matlock, he judged that he had come to the end of his passion for her; and here he was again at the very beginning of it. Instead of perishing it had thrived on absence. He found himself on the verge of a new and unforeseen adventure, with impulse sharpened by antagonism and frustration. Yet his only chance, he knew, was not to be impulsive, but cool rather, calculating and cautious. The fight he was in for would have to be fought with brains; his against hers.

He sent a note to her early in the morning asking her to see him at nine. At nine she saw him.

"I thought," she said, "you were going up to town early."

"I 'm not going up to town at all, as it happens, to-day."

"Is n't it rather a pity to neglect your business?"

"My business, dear Kitty, is not any business of yours."

"I 'm only trying to make you see that it is n't worth your while stopping out of town because of me."

He was a little disconcerted at her divination of his motives, her awareness of her own power.

"Well, you see, though the affairs of Whitehall are not your affairs, your affairs, unfortunately, are mine; and, since I have to attend to them, I prefer to do it at once and get it over. I had some talk with Lucy last night."

She turned on him. "Ah, you *have* given me away."

"Did you ever know me give any one away?"

She did not answer all at once.

He was shocked at her suspicion; at the things she believed it possible for a man to

do. In the upper world, in a set that discussed its women freely, he had never used his knowledge of a woman to harm her. He had carried the same scruple into that other world where Kitty lived, where he himself was most at home, where an amused, contemptuous tolerance played the part of chivalry. The women there trusted him; they found him courteous in his very contempt. He had connived at their small deceits, the preposterous hypocrisies wherewith they protected themselves. He accepted urbanely their pitiful imitations of the lost innocence. Kitty, moving reckless and high in her sad circle, had been scornful of her sisters' methods. Her soul was as much above them as her body, in its unique, incongruous beauty, was above their rouge and coloured raiment. It was this superiority of hers that had brought her to her present pass; caused her to be mistaken for an honest woman. In her contempt for the under-

world's deceptions she had achieved the supreme deceit.

Her deceit — that was his point.

"Then," she said presently, "what *did* you say to him?"

"I said nothing, my dear child, in your disparagement. On the contrary, I congratulated him on his engagement. As I 'm supposed to be acting as your agent, or solicitor, or whatever it is I am acting as, I imagine I did right. Is that so?"

"Yes; if that 's all you said."

"It is not quite all. I sustained my character by giving him a hint, the merest hint, that in the event of your marriage your worldly position would be slightly altered. We must prepare him, you know, for the sudden collapse of your income."

He rose and went to the mantelpiece, and lingered there over the lighting of a cigarette.

"You had n't thought of that?" he said as he seated himself again.

"No; I had n't thought of it."

"Well, he did n't appear to have thought of it either."

"What did he say, when you told him that?"

"He said it did n't matter in the very least."

"I knew he would."

"He said, in fact, that nothing mattered."

"What did you say then?"

"Nothing. What could I say?"

She looked at him, trying to see deep into his design, trusting him no further than she saw.

"Look here, Kitty, I think you 're making a mistake, even from your own point of view. You ought to tell him."

"I — can't."

"You must. He 's such an awfully decent chap, you can 't let him in for marrying you without telling him." That was his point and he meant to stick to it. "It 's what you might call playing it low down on a guileless and confiding man. Is n't it?"

"Yes, but I can't tell him."

"It 's the straight thing, Kitty."

"I know. But it means giving him up."

"Not at all. He 'll respect you all the more for it. He won't go back on you."

"He would n't if he 'd only himself to think of."

"He is n't bound to tell his people. That 's another thing."

"It is n't his people — it 's — it 's his children."

Marston became suddenly attentive. "His children? He 's got children, has he?"

"Yes, two; two little girls."

That strengthened his point.

"Then, my dear girl, you can't — in common decency — not tell him. Hang it all, you 've got to give the man a chance."

"A chance to escape? You talk as if I 'd set a trap for him."

"My dear child, you have n't sense enough to set a trap. But, since there are spring-guns in his neighbourhood, I repeat that

you ought to inform him of the fact. I dare say he would n't funk a spring-gun on his own account, but he may not want his children to be hurt."

"I know. He 'd be afraid I should contaminate them. I would n't, Wilfrid, I would n't. I would n't hurt them for the world."

"I 'm sure you would n't. But he might think you would. The fathers of little girls sometimes have strange prejudices. You see it 's all very well as long as you can keep him in his beautiful innocence. But, if he finds out that you 've deceived him, he — well, he might resent it."

He never turned his eyes from that livid, vulnerable spot, striking at it with the sword-thrust of his point.

"A man can forgive many things in a woman, but not that."

"I must risk it. He may n't find out for years and years. If I tell him I shall lose him now."

"Not necessarily. Not if he cares for you as much as I should say he does."

"It does n't matter how much he cares. He 'd never marry me."

"No. He might make another and more sensible arrangement."

"And then?" She faced him with it.

"Then you 'll be satisfied. You 'll have had your fling."

"And — when — I 've — had it?" she said slowly.

"Then, I suppose, I shall have to take you back."

"I see. That 's where you think you 'll come in."

"I was n't thinking, at the moment, of myself. The suggestion was thrown out entirely on your behalf, and I may say his. I 'm simply telling you what — knowing you as I do — I consider the wiser course, for both of you."

"You don't know. And you don't know him. He would n't do it. He is n't that sort."

She paused, brooding over it.

"Besides, I could n't bear it. I can't go back to that."

"And how many years do you think you 'll stand being proper and respectable, which is what you 'll have to be as long as you 're Mrs. Robert Lucy? It 's a stiffish job, my child, for you to tackle. Just think of the practical difficulties. I 've accounted for the sudden, very singular collapse of your income, but there are all sorts of things that you won't be able to account for. The disappearance, for instance, of the entire circle of your acquaintance."

She smiled. "It would be *much* more awkward if it did n't disappear."

"True. Still, a female friend or two is an indispensable part of a married woman's outfit. The Lucys may n't mind, but their friends may regard the omission as peculiar. Then — you have charming manners, I know — but your speech is apt, at times, to be a little, what shall I say? Unfettered.

The other day, when you were annoyed with me, you called me a beast."

"That 's nothing. I might have called you something much worse."

"You might. Happily, you did not. I 've no objection to the word; it can be used as a delicate endearment, but in your mouth it loses any tender grace it might have had."

"I 'm sorry, Wilfrid."

"Don't apologise. *I* did n't mind. But if you call Lucy a beast he won't like it."

"I could n't. Besides, I shall be very careful."

"You will have to be extremely careful. The Lucys live in Hampstead, I believe, and Hampstead enjoys the reputation of being the most respectable suburb of London. You 've no idea of the sort of people you 'll have to meet there. You 'll terrify them, and they, my poor Kitten, will exterminate you. You don't know what respectability is like."

"I don't care. I can stand anything."

"You think you can. I *know* that you won't be able to stand it for a fortnight. You 'll find that the air of Hampstead does n't agree with you. And wherever you go it 'll be the same thing. You had very much better stick to me."

"To you?"

"You 'll be safer and happier. If you 'll stay with me ——"

"I never have — stayed — with you."

"No, but I 'd like you to."

He was not going to make love to her. He was far too clever for that. He knew that with a woman like Kitty, in Kitty's state of mind, he had nothing to gain by making love. Neither did he propose to pit his will against hers. That course had answered well enough in the time of his possession of her. Passion, which was great in her, greater than her will, made his will powerless over her. His plan was to match the forces of her brain with superior, with overwhelming forces.

He continued coldly. "I 'm not satisfied with the present arrangement any more than you are. If you 'll stay with me you shall live where you choose; only don't choose Park Lane, for I can't afford it. I 'll give you any mortal thing I *can* afford."

"You think you can give me what Robert Lucy 's giving me?"

"I can give you a home, Kitty, as long as you 'll live in it. I can give you the advantages of marriage without its drawbacks. You won't be tied to me a minute longer than you like. Whereas you can't leave Lucy without a scandal."

"You think that a safe arrangement, do you? I can leave you when I want to."

"You can leave me any day. So the chances are that you won't want to."

"And when you 're tired of me?"

"That 's it. I shan't be tired of you. I 've a different feeling for you from any I 've ever had for any other woman, for the simple reason that you 're a different woman every

"'You won't be tied to me a minute longer than you like.'"

time I see you. That 's the secret of your fascination. Did n't you know it?"

She shook her head, but she was not attending to him.

"If you don't know it there 's no harm in telling you that I 'm very fond of you."

"What earthly use is it, Wilfrid, being fond of me, as long as I 'm not fond of you?"

Ah, that was a mistake. He was on perilous ground. She was strong there. She matched his bloodless, unblushing candour with her throbbing, passionate sincerity.

"That 's all the better," he said. "It would n't pay you, Kitty, to be fond of me. If I thought you were fond of me to-day it would leave me with nothing to look forward to to-morrow. If you were as fond of me as you are of Lucy, it would bore me horribly. What 's more, it would bore you. It would tire you out, and you 'd bolt in a week's time. As, I can tell you, you 'll bolt from him."

"You think I shall do that. He does n't. That 's why I 'm fond of him."

"I would n't be too fond of him. It never pays. Either you 'll tire of him in a week, or, if you go on being fond of him you 'll end by being afraid of him. You need never be afraid of me."

"I *am* afraid of you."

"Not you. I understand you, Kitty, and he does n't."

"You mean you know the worst of me?"

"Precisely. What 's more, I should condone what you call the worst of you, and he would n't."

"I know you would. That 's why I 'm afraid of you. You only know the worst of me, and he — he knows, he understands, the rest. There 's something in me that you 've never seen; you could n't see it; you would n't believe in it; you 'd kill it if I stayed with you. It 's no use talking, for I won't."

"Why not?" he asked as if nothing she had said had been of any moment.

"I 've told you why not. But I don't expect you to understand it."

"If there 's anything in it I shall understand it in the end. I 'm not a fool."

"No, you 're not a fool. I 'll say that for you."

"Unless it 's folly to be as fond of you as I am."

"Oh, no, that 's not folly. You 'll be fond of me just as long as I 'm nice to look at; as long as it does n't bore you to talk to me; as long as I don't give you any trouble."

"Good God! Why, look at the trouble you 're giving me now."

"Yes, the trouble I 'm giving you now, when I 'm young and pretty and you can't have me. But when you *have* had me; when I 'm tired out and ill and — and thin; will you be fool enough to be fond of me then?"

"You have been ill, you were ill last night, and — I 've got over it."

"You never came near me when I was ill at Matlock. You call that giving me what Robert Lucy gives me? Robert has seen me

when I 've been as ugly as sin, when my eyes have been bunged up with crying. And it made no difference. He 'll love me when I 'm thin and ill and old. When I 'm dead he'll love me."

He faced her passion as it flamed up before him, faced it with his cold, meditative smile.

"That 's just what makes it such a beastly shame."

"My not giving him up? How *can* I give him up?"

"I see your point. You think you 're exchanging a temporary affection for a permanent one. You admit that I shall love you as long as you 're nice to look at. Very well. You 'll be nice to look at for some considerable time. I shall therefore love you for some considerable time. Robert Lucy will love you just as long as he believes in you. How long will that be?"

She did not answer.

"You don't know. Have you calculated

the probable effect of gradual enlightenment on our friend's mind?"

"I 've calculated nothing."

"No. You are not a calculating woman. I just ask you to consider this point. I am not, as you know, in the least surprised at any of your charming little aberrations. But our friend Lucy has not had many surprises in his life. He 'll come to you with an infinite capacity for astonishment. It 's quite uncertain how he 'll take — er — anything in the nature of a surprise. And, if you ask me, I should say he 'd take it hard. Are you going to risk that?"

He was returning to his point even when he feigned to have lost sight of it. Tortured and panting she evaded it with pitiful subterfuges. He urged her back, pressing her tender breast against the prick of it.

"I 'm going to risk everything," she said.

"Risk it, risk it, then. Tie yourself for life to a man you don't know; who does n't really know you, though you think he does;

who on your own showing would n't marry you if he did know. You see what a whopping big risk it is, for he 's bound to know in the end."

She sickened and wearied. "He is not bound to know. Why is he?"

"Because, my dear girl, you 're bound to give yourself away some day. I know you. I know the perverse little devil that is in you. When you realise what you 've let yourself in for you 'll break loose, suddenly — like that." He threw out his arms as if he burst bonds asunder. "You can't help yourself. You simply can't live the life. You may yearn for it, but you can't live it."

"I don't want to be respectable. It is n't that."

"What is it then?"

"Can't you see?"

He looked at her closely, as if he saw it for the first time.

"Are you so awfully gone on him?"

"Yes," she said. "You *won't* tell him? It 'll kill me if he knows."

"You think it will, but it won't."

"I shall kill myself, then."

"Oh no, you won't. You only think you will. It 's Lucy I 'm sorry for."

"And it 's me you 're hard on. You were always hard. You say you condone things, but you condone nothing, and you 're not good yourself."

"No, I 'm not good myself. But there is conduct and conduct. I can condone everything but the fraud you 're practising on this innocent man." He rose. "It 's — well — you see, it 's such a beastly shame."

It was to be a battle of brains, and she had foiled him with the indomitable stupidity of her passion. But his point — the one point that he stuck to — was a sword point for her passion.

"You won't tell him? You won't? It would be a blackguardly thing to do."

"If Lucy was a friend of mine I 'm afraid

the blackguardly thing would be to hold my tongue."

"You 'd tell him then?" she said. "You would n't think of me?"

She came to him. She laid her arms upon his shoulders. Her hands touched him with dispassionate, deliberate, ineffectual caresses, a pitiful return to a discarded manner, an outrageous imitation of the old professional cajoleries. It was so poor a thing that it had no power to move him. What moved him was the look in her eyes, the look which his brain told him was the desperate, incredulous appeal of her unhappy soul.

"I don't know, Kitty," he said. "Thank heaven, he 's not a friend of mine."

CHAPTER XVI

IT WAS not from Marston, then, that she had to fear betrayal. Neither was she any more afraid of the rumours of the Cliff Hotel. She was aware that her engagement to Robert Lucy, unannounced but accepted for the simple fact it was, had raised her above censure and suspicion.

It had come just in time to occupy Mrs. Jurd and Miss Keating on their way to Surbiton.

When Kitty thought of Grace Keating she said to herself, "How will Bunny feel now?" But her mortal exultation was checked by her pity for poor Bunny, who would have been so happy if she had been married.

Then there were the Hankins. She reflected sanely that they could n't be dangerous, for they knew nothing. Still she did feel

a little uneasy when she thought of the Hankins.

She was thinking of them now as she and Robert sat on the Cliff, making the most of their last hour together before the arrival of the little girls.

"Robert," she said, "the Hankins are probably sitting down there under the Cliff. Supposing they see us?"

"They can't, we 're over their heads."

"But if they do what do you suppose they 'll think?"

"If they think at all, they 'll have an inkling of the truth. But it is n't their business. The children will be here soon," he added.

She looked at him intently. Was he trying, she wondered, to reassure her that the presence of his children would protect her? Or was he merely preoccupied with the thought of their arrival?"

"You don't mind," he said presently, "not coming to the station?"

He had said that already twice before. Why ask, she said, when he knew perfectly well she did n't mind?

Of course she did n't mind. She knew his idea, that they were not to be confronted with her suddenly. He meant to let her dawn on them beautifully, with the tenderest gradations. He would approach them with an incomparable cunning. He would tell them that they were going to see a very pretty lady. And when they were thoroughly inured to the idea of her, he would announce that the pretty lady was coming to stay with them, and that she would never go away.

She looked at her watch.

"We 've got another half-hour before they come,"

"Kitty, I believe you 're afraid of them?"

"Yes, Robert, I 'm afraid."

"What? Of two small children?"

"What are they like? I have n't asked you that."

"Well, Janet's a queer, uncanny little person, rather long for her age and very thin ——"

"Like you?"

"Like me. At first you think she 's all legs. Then you see a little white face with enormous eyes that look at you as if she was wondering what you are."

He smiled. His mind had gone off, away from her, to the contemplation of his little daughter.

"I think she is clever, but one never knows. We have to handle her very carefully. Barbara 's all right. You can pitch her about like anything."

"What is Barbara like?"

"Barbara? She 's round and fat and going to be pretty, like ——"

"Like her mother?"

"No, like Janey, if Janey was fat. They 're both a little difficult to manage. If you reprove Barbara, she bursts out laughing in your face. If you even hint to Janet that

you disapprove of her, she goes away somewhere and weeps."

"Poor little thing. I 'm afraid," said Kitty sadly, "they 're not so very small."

"Well, Janet, I believe, is seven, and Barbara is five."

"Barbara is five. And, oh dear me, Janet is seven."

"Is that such a very formidable age?"

She laughed uneasily. "Yes. That 's the age when they begin to take notice, is n't is?"

"Oh, no, they do that when they 're babies. Even Barbara 's grown out of that. I say, Kitty, what a lot you know."

"Don't, Robert." She looked at him imploringly and put her hand in his.

"I won't, if you 'll only tell me what I 'm not to do."

"You 're not to tease me about the things you think I don't know. I used to nurse my little sisters, when I was n't very big myself. I can't nurse Janet, or Barbara, can I?"

"Why not?"

"They would n't let me. They 're too old. It won't be the same thing at all."

"Well," said Robert, and paused, hiding from her the thing that was in his mind.

"Oh, Robert, I do wish, I do wish they were really small."

"I 'm sorry, Kitty. But perhaps ——"

He could not hide anything from Kitty.

"No, Robert," she said, "I 'm afraid there won't be any perhaps. That 's one of the things I meant to tell you. But I 'm not bothering about that. I meant — if they were little — little things, I should n't be so dreadfully afraid of them."

"Why? What do you think they 'll do to you, Kitty?"

"I — don't — know."

"You need n't be alarmed. I believe they 're very well-behaved. Jane has brought them up quite nicely."

"What is Jane going to do?"

"Ah — that 's what I wanted to ask you about."

"You need n't ask me. You want her to stay and look after them just the same?"

"No, not just the same. I want her to stay and she won't. She says it would n't be fair to you."

"But — if she only would, that would make it all so easy. You see, I could look after you, and she could look after them."

"You don't want to be bored with them?"

"You know that is n't what I mean. I don't want them to suffer."

"Why *should* they suffer?" There was some irritation in his tone.

"Because I don't think, Robert, I 'm really fit to bring up children."

"I think you are. And I don't mean anybody else to bring them up. If you 're my wife, Kitty, you 're their mother."

"And they 're to be mine as well as yours?"

"As much yours as you can make them, dear."

"Oh, how you trust me. That 's what

makes me so afraid. And — do you think they 'll really love me?"

"Trust *them* — for that."

"You asked me if I could care for you, Robert; you never asked me if I could care for them. You trusted me for that!"

"I could have forgiven you if you could n't care for *me*."

"But you could n't forgive me if I did n't care for them? Is that it?"

"No; I simply could n't understand any woman not caring for them. I think you *will* like the little things, when you 've seen them."

"I 'll promise you one thing. I won't be jealous of them."

"Jealous? Why on earth should you be?"

"Some women are. I was afraid I might be that sort."

"Why?"

"Because — oh, because I care for you so awfully. But that 's just it. That 's why I can't be jealous of them. They 're yours, you see. I can't separate them from you."

"Well, well, let 's wait until you 've seen them."

"Don't you believe me, Robert? Women *do* love their children before they 've seen them. I don't need to see them. I *have* seen them. I saw them all last night."

She looked away from him, brooding, as if she still saw them.

"There 's only one person I could be jealous of, and I 'm not jealous of her any more."

"Poor little Jane."

"It was n't Jane. It was their mother. I mean it was your wife."

He turned and looked at her. There was amazement in his kind, simple face.

"I suppose you think that 's fiendish of me?"

He did not reply.

"But — Robert — I 'm not jealous of her any more. I don't care if she was your wife."

"Kitty, my dear child ——"

"I don't care if she had ten children and *I* never had one. It 's got nothing to do with it. She had you for — two years, was n't it?"

"Two years, Kitty."

"Poor thing; and I shall have you all my life."

"Yes. And so, if you don't mind, dear, I 'd rather you did n't talk about that again."

"I 'm sorry. I won't ever again."

She sat silent for a moment in a sort of penitential shame. Then she burst out —

"I 'm not jealous. But, Robert, if you were to leave me for another woman it would kill me. I dare n't say that to any other man if I cared for him. It would just make him go and do it. But I believe somehow you 'd think twice before you killed me."

He only smiled at this, and spoke gently.

"Yes, Kitty, you 're right. I believe I *would* think twice about it."

He said to himself that this fierceness,

her passionate perversity, all that was most unintelligible in her, was just Kitty's way—the way of a woman recklessly, adorably in love. It stirred in him the very depths of tenderness. When she was married (they must marry very soon) she would be happy; she would understand him; she would settle down.

He looked at his watch. "I 'm afraid I must be going."

She glanced at the hands of the watch over his shoulder. "You need n't," she said. "It is n't really time."

"Well — five minutes."

The five minutes went. "Time 's up," he said.

"Oh, no, Robert — not yet."

"Kitty — don't you want to see them?"

"I don't want you to go."

"I 'm coming back."

"Yes, but it won't be the same thing. It never will be the same thing as now."

"Poor Kitty — I say, I *must* go and meet them."

"Very well," She stood up. "Kiss me," she said.

She took his kiss as if it were the last that would be given her.

They went together to the hotel. Jane had started five minutes ago for the station.

"It 's all right," he said. "I 'll catch her up."

She followed to the gates and looked down the white road where Jane had gone.

"Let me come with you — just a little way — to the first lamp-post on the station road."

"Well, to the first lamp-post."

At the lamp-post she let him go.

She stood looking after him till he swung round the turn of the road, out of her sight. Then she went back, slowly, sad-eyed, and with a great terror in her heart.

CHAPTER XVII

IT WAS not the thing she had confessed to him, fear of his little unseen children, it was terror, unconfessed, uncomprehended, as it were foreknowledge of the very soul of destiny clothed for her in their tender flesh and blood.

Up till now she had been careless of her destiny. She had been so joyous, so defiant in her sinning. By that charm of hers, younger than youth, indestructibly childlike, she had carried it through with the audacity of chartered innocence. She had propitiated, ignored, eluded the more feminine amenities of fate. Of course, she had had her bad moments. She had been sorry, sometimes, and she had been sick; but on the whole her powers had been splendidly recuperative. She had shown none of those naked tender spots that provoke destiny to strike. And with it all she had preserved, perhaps too

scrupulously, the rules laid down for such as she. She had kept her own place. She had never attempted to invade the sanctuaries set apart for other women.

It was Robert who had tempted her to that transgression. He had opened the door of the sanctuary for her and shut it behind her and put his back against it. He had made her believe that if she stayed in there, with him, it would be all right. She might have known what would happen. It was for such a moment, of infatuation made perfect, that destiny was waiting.

Kitty had no very luminous idea of its intentions. But she bore in her blood forebodings, older and obscurer than the flashes of the brain; and her heart had swift immortal instincts, forerunners of the mortal hours. The powers of pain, infallibly wise, implacably just, would choose their moment well, striking at her through the hands of the children she had never borne.

If Robert found out what she was before

he married her, he would have to give her up because of them. She knew better than he did the hold she had over him. She had tried to keep him in ignorance of her power, so great was her terror of what it might do to him, and to her through him. Yet, with all her sad science, she remained uncertain of his ultimate behaviour. That was the charm and the danger of him. For fear of some undiscovered, uncalculated quality in him she had held herself back; she had been careful how she touched him, how she looked at him, lest her hands or her eyes should betray her; lest in his heart he should call her by her name, and fling her from him because of them. Whereas, but for them, she judged that whatever she was he would not give her up. She was not quite sure (you could n't say *what* a man like Robert would or would n't do), but she felt that if she could have had him to herself, if there had been only he and she, facing the world, then, for sheer chivalry,

he simply could n't have left her. Even now, once he was married to her it would be all right; he could n't give her up or leave her; the worst he could do would be to separate her from them.

There was really no reason then why she should be frightened. He was going to marry her very soon. She knew that, by her science, though he had not said so. She would be all right. She would be very careful. It was n't as if she did n't want to be nice and to do all the proper things.

And so Kitty cast off care.

Only, as she waited in the room prepared for the children, she looked at herself in the glass, once, to make sure that there was nothing in her face that could betray her. No; Nature had spared her as yet and her youth was good to her. Her face looked back at her, triumphantly reticent, innocent of memory, holding her charm, a secret beyond the secrets of corruption, as her perfect body held the mystery and the

prophecy of her power. Besides, her face was different now from what it had been. Wilfrid had intimated to her that it was different. It was the face that Robert loved; it had the look that told him that she loved him, a look it never wore for any other man. Even now as she thought of him it lightened and grew rosy. She saw it herself and wondered and took hope. "That 's how I look when I 'm happy, is it? I 'm always happy when I 'm with him, so," she reasoned, "he will always see me like that; and it will be all right."

Anyhow, there would be no unhappiness about his pretty lady when he came back with them.

She smiled softly as she went about the room, putting the touches of perfection to the festival. There were roses everywhere; on the table, on the mantelpicee; the room was sweet with the smell of them; there was a rose on each child's plate. The tremulous movements of her hands betrayed

the immensity and the desperation of her passion to please. The very waiter was touched by her, and smiled secretly in sympathy as he saw her laying her pretty lures. When he had gone she arranged the table all over again and did it better. Then she stood looking at it, hovering round it, thinking. She would sit here, and the children there, Janet between her and Robert, Barbara between her and Jane.

"Poor little things," she said, "poor little things." She yearned to them even in her fear of them, and when she thought of them sitting there her lips moved in unspoken, pitiful endearments.

The light from the south-west streamed into the little room and made it golden. Everything in it shimmered and shone. The window, flung wide open to the veranda, framed the green lawn and the shining, shimmering sea. A wind, small and soft, stirred the thin curtains to and fro, fanning the warm air. The sunlight and heat oppressed

her. She shut her eyes and put her hands over them to cool them with darkness. It was a trick she had when she was troubled.

She sat by the window and waited in the strange, throbbing darkness of hot eyes closed in daylight, a darkness smitten by the sun and shot with a fiery fume.

They were coming now. She heard feet on the gravel outside, round the corner; she heard Robert's voice and Janey's; and then little shuffling footsteps at the door, and two voices shrill and sweet.

Robert came in first and the children with him. They stood all three on the threshold, looking at her. Robert was smiling, but the little girls (they were very little) were grave. His eyes drew her and she came toward them as she was used to come to the things of her desire, swift and shy, with a trailing, troubling movement; the way that he had seen her come, swayed by the rhythm of impulse.

The children stood stock still as she

stooped to them. Her fear of them made her supremely gentle. Little Barbara put up her round rose face with its soft mouth thrust forward in a premature kiss. Janet gave her a tiny hand and gazed at her with brooding, irresponsive eyes. Her little mouth never moved as Kitty's mouth touched it.

But little Barbara held out her spade and bucket for Kitty to see. "Look, look," said little Barbara, "Daddy gave them me to build castles in the sand." Barbara spoke so fast that she panted, and laughed in a divine superfluity of joy.

Robert stood looking down from his tremendous height at Barbara, tenderly as one who contemplates a thing at once heart-rending and absurd. Then his eyes turned to Kitty, smiling quietly as if they said, "Did n't I tell you to wait until you 'd seen them?" Kitty's heart contracted with a sharp, abominable pang.

Then Janey took the little girls to the room upstairs where their nurse was. Bar-

bara looked back at Kitty as she went, but Kitty's eyes followed Janet.

"Robert," she said, "will she always look at me like that? Shall I never know what she is thinking?"

"None of us know what Janet 's thinking."

He paused.

"I told you we had to be very careful of her."

"Is she delicate?"

"No. Physically, she 's far stronger than Barbara. She 's what you call morally delicate."

She flushed. "What do you mean, Robert?

"Well — not able to bear things. For instance, we 'd a small child staying with us once. It turned out that she was n't a nice child at all. We did n't know it, though. But Janet had a perfect horror of her. It 's as if she had a sort of intuition. She was so unhappy about it that we had to send the child away."

His forehead was drawn into a frown of worry and perplexity.

"I don't see how she 's to grow up. It makes me feel so awfully responsible. The world is n't an entirely pretty place, you know, and it seems such a cruel shame to bring a child like that into it. Does n't it?"

"Yes."

"Somehow I think you 'll understand her, Kitty."

"Yes, Robert, I understand."

She came to him. She laid her hand on the sleeve of his coat, and stood by him. Her eyes were shining through some dew that was not tears.

"What is it, Kitty?"

"Will you marry me soon?" she said. "Very soon?" she whispered. "I — I can't wait." She hid her face against his arm.

He thought it was the motherhood in her that was moved, that pleaded, impatient for its hour.

"Why should we wait? Do you suppose I want to?"

"Hush!" she said. "They 're coming."

They came a little solemnly, as beseemed a festival. Janet, in her long white pinafore, looked more than ever the spiritual thing she was. Her long brown hair hung down her cheeks, straight and smooth as a parted veil, sharpening her small face, that flickered as a flame flickers in troubled air. Beside her little Barbara bloomed and glowed, with cheeks full-blown, and cropped head flowering into curls that stood on end in brown tufts, and tawny feathers, and little crests of gold. They took their places, pensively, at the table.

They had beautiful manners, Robert's children; little exquisite, gentle ways of approaching and of handling things. They held themselves very erect, with a secure, diminutive distinction. Kitty's heart sank deeper as she looked at them. Even Barbara, who was so very young, carried her small perfections intact through all the spontaneities of her behaviour.

All through tea-time little Barbara, pursued

by her dream, talked incessantly of castles in the sand. And when she was tired of talking she began to sing.

"Darling," said Jane, "we don't sing at tea-time."

"I do," said little Barbara, and laughed.

Jane laughed too, hysterically.

Then the spirit of little Barbara entered into Jane, and made her ungovernably gay. It passed into Kitty, and ran riot in her blood and nerves. Whenever Barbara laughed Kitty laughed, and when Kitty laughed Robert laughed too. Even Janet gave a little shriek now and then. The children thought it was all because they had had strawberries and cream for tea, and were going down to the sea to build castles in the sand.

All afternoon, till dinner-time, Kitty laboured on the sands, building castles as if she had never done anything else in her life. The Hankins watched her from their seat on the rocks in the angle of the Cliff.

"We were mistaken. She must be all right. How pretty she is, too, poor thing," said Mrs. Hankin to her husband.

"How pretty she is, how absolutely lovable and good," said Robert to himself as he watched her, while Barbara, a tired little labourer, lay stretched in her lap. She was sitting on a rock under the Cliff, with the great brow of it for a canopy. Her eyes were lowered, and hidden by their deep lids. She was smiling at the child who leaned back in her arms, crushing a soft cheek against her breast.

He threw himself down beside her. He had just finished a prodigious fortress, with earthworks and trenches extending to the sea.

"Kitty, Kitty," he said, "you 're only a child yourself, like Janey. She 's perfectly happy building castles in the sand — so are you. You 're a perfect baby."

"We 're all babies, Robert, building castles in the sand. And you 're the biggest baby of the lot."

"I don't care. I've built the biggest castle."

"Look at Janet," said Kitty. "She'll be grown up before any of us."

The child sat on a rock with Jane. But, from the distance that she kept, she looked at her father and Kitty from time to time. All afternoon Janet had clung to Jane. But when bed-time came Robert took her aside and whispered something to her. Going home she walked by Kitty, and put her hand in hers.

"Daddy said I'm to be very kind to you."

"Did he? That's very kind of daddy."

"Daddy's always kind to people. Especially when they've not been very happy. Really and truly I'm going to be kind. But you won't mind if I don't love you very soon, will you?"

"Of course I won't. Only don't leave it too late, darling."

"Well, I don't know," said Janet thoughtfully; "we've lots of time."

"Have we?"

"Heaps and heaps. You see, I love Auntie Janey, and it might hurt her feelings."

"I see."

"But I 'm going to give you something," said Janet presently.

"I don't want you to give me anything that belongs to Auntie Janey."

"No," said Janet; "I shall give you something of my own."

"Oh! And you can't tell me what it 's going to be?"

"I must think about it." The little girl became lost in thought. "Barbara likes kissing people. I don't."

"So I see. It won't be kisses, then?"

"No; it won't be kisses. It will," she reiterated, "be something of my own."

She dropped Kitty's hand.

"You won't mind if I go to Auntie Janey now?"

Kitty told Janey about it afterward, as they sat alone in the lounge before dinner.

"You must n't mind, Kitty dear," said Jane. "It only means that she 's a faithful little soul. She 'll be just as faithful to you some day."

"Some day."

"Don't sigh like that, Kitty."

"She 's like Robert, is n't she?"

"Very like Robert."

She brooded.

"Janey," she said, "let me have him to myself this evening."

All evening she had him to herself, out on the Cliff, in the place where nobody came but they.

"Well," he said, "what do you think of them?"

"I think they 're adorable."

"Funny little beggars, are n't they? How did you get on with Janet?"

She told him.

"That 's Janet's little way. To give you something of her own." He smiled in tender satisfaction, repeating the child's phrase.

"It 's all right, Kitty. She 's only holding herself in. You 're in for a big thing."

She surveyed it.

"I know, Robert. I know."

"You 're tired? Have the children been too much for you?"

She shook her head.

"You 're not to make yourself a slave to them, you know."

She looked at him.

"Was I all right, Robert?"

"You were perfect."

"You said I was only a child myself."

"So you are. That 's why I like you."

She shook her head again.

"It 's all very well," she said, "but that is n't what you want, dear — another child."

"How do you know what I want?"

"You want somebody much nicer than I am."

He was silent, looking at her as he had looked at Barbara, enjoying her absurdity, letting her play, like the child she was, with her preposterous idea.

"Oh, Robert, you do *really* think I 'm nice?" She came nearer to him, crying out like a child in pain. He put his arm round her, and comforted her as best he could.

"You child, do you suppose I 'd marry you if I did n't think you nice?"

"You might. You might n't care."

"As it happens, I do care, very much. Anyhow, I would n't ask you to be a mother to my children if I did n't think you nice. That 's the test."

"Yes, Robert," she repeated, "that 's the test."

They rose and went back to the hotel. From the lawn they could see the open window of the children's room. They looked up.

"Would you like to see them, Kitty?"

"Yes."

He took her up to them. They were asleep. Little Barbara lay curled up in the big bed, right in the middle of it where her dreams had tossed her. Janet, in the cot beside her, lay very straight and still.

Robert signed to Kitty to come near, and they stood together and looked first at the children and then into each other's faces. Kitty was very quiet.

"Do you like them?" he whispered.

Her lips quivered, but she made no sign.

He stooped over each bed, smoothing the long hair from Janet's forehead, folding back the blanket that weighed on Barbara's little body. When he turned, Kitty had gone. She had slipped into her own room.

She waited till she heard Robert go away. The children were alone in there. The nurse, she knew, was in Jane's room across the passage. Jane was probably telling her that her master was to be married very soon.

She looked out. The door of Jane's room was shut; so was the door of the children's room through which Robert had gone out. The other, the door of communication, she had left ajar. She went softly back through it and stood again by the children's beds. Janet was still sound asleep. Her fine limbs

were still stretched straight and quiet under the blanket. Her hair was as Robert's hand had left it.

Kitty was afraid of disturbing Janet's sleep. She was afraid of Janet.

She stooped over little Barbara, and turned back the bedclothes from the bed. She laid herself down, half her length, upon it by Barbara's side, and folded her in arms that scarcely touched her at first, so light they lay on her. Then some perverse and passionate impulse seized her to wake the child. She did it gently, tenderly, holding back her passion, troubling the depths of sleep with fine, feather-like touches, with kisses soft as sleep.

The child stirred under the caressing arms. She lay in her divine beauty, half asleep, half awake, opening her eyes, and shutting them on the secret of her dream. Then Kitty's troubling hand turned her from her flight down the ways of sleep. She lay on her back, her eyes glimmered in

the lifting of their lids; they opened under Kitty's eyes that watched them, luminous, large and clear. Her mouth curled under Kitty's mouth, in drowsy kisses plucked from the annihilated dream. She drew up her rosy knees and held out her arms to Kitty's arms and smiled, half awake and half asleep.

Kitty rose, lifting the child with her from the bed. She held her close, pressing the tender body close to her own body with quivering hands, stroking the adorable little face with her own face, closing her eyes under the touch of it as she closed them when Robert's face touched hers. She was aware that she had brought some passionate, earthly quality of her love for Robert into her love for Robert's child.

She said to herself, "I 'm terrible; there 's something wrong with me. This is n't the way to love a child."

She laid the little thing down again, freed her neck from the drowsy, detaining arms,

and covered the small body up out of her sight. Barbara, thus abandoned, cried, and the cry cut through her heart.

She went into her own room, and threw herself on her bed and writhed there, torn by many pangs. The pang of the heart and the pang of the half-born spirit, struggling with the body that held it back from birth; and through it all the pang of the motherhood she had thwarted and disowned. Out of the very soil of corruption it pierced, sharp and pure, infinitely painful. It was almost indiscernible from the fierce exultation of her heart that had found fulfilment, and from the passion of her body that yet waited for its own.

She undressed herself, and crept into her bed and lay there, tortured, visited by many memories. She gazed with terrified, pitiful eyes into a darkness that was peopled for her with all the faces she had known in the short seasons of her sinning; men, and the women who had been her friends and her com-

panions; and the strangers who had passed her by, or who had lingered and looked on. The faces of Robert and his children hung somewhere on the outskirts of her vision, but she could not fix them or hold them; they were trampled out, obliterated by that phantasmal procession of her shames. Some faces, more terrible than all, detached themselves and crowded round her, the faces of those who had pursued her, and of those whom her own light feet pursued; from the first who had found her and left her, to the last whom she herself had held captive and let go. They stood about her bed; they stretched out their hands and touched her; their faces peered into hers; faces that she had forgotten. She thrust them from her into the darkness and they came again. Each bore the same likeness to his fellow; each had the same looks, the same gestures that defied her to forget. She fell asleep; and the dreams, the treacherous, perpetually remembering, delivered her into their hands.

She waked at dawn, with memory quickened by her dreams. She heard voices now, all the voices that had accused her. Her mother's voice spoke first, and it was very sad. It said, "I am sending you away, Kitty, because of the children." Then her father's voice, very stern. "No, I will not have you back. You must stay where you are for your little sisters' sake." And her mother's voice again — afterward — sad and stern, too, this time. "As you made your bed, Kitty, you must lie. We can't take you back."

And there was a third voice. It said very softly, "You can't have it both ways." It cried out aloud in a fury, "I 've always known it. You can't hide it. You 're full of it." And yet another voice, deep and hard, "You can't *not* tell him. It 's a shame Kitty; it 's an awful shame."

She could not sleep again for listening to them.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT WAS morning. She dragged herself up and tried to dress. But her hands shook and her head ached violently. She stretched herself half-dressed upon her bed and lay there helpless, surrendered to the bodily pain that delivered her mercifully from the anguish of her mind.

She saw no one, not even Jane Lucy.

Outside, in the passage, and in the inner room she heard the footsteps of the children and their little shrill voices; each sound accentuated the stabbing pulse of pain. It was impossible to darken the room, and the insufferable sunlight poured in unchecked through the thin yellow blinds and plagued her brain, till the nerves of vision throbbed, beat for beat, with the nerves of torment. At noon she had only one sensation of brilliant surging pain.

She dozed and her headache lifted. When she woke her body was weak as if it had had a fever, but her mind closed on reality with the impact of a force delayed.

There was a thing not yet quite real to her, a thing that seemed to belong to the region of bodily pain, to be born there as a bad dream might be born; a thing that had been there last night among other things, that, as she stared at it, became more prominent, more poignant than they. And yet, though its air was so beckoning and so familiar, it was not among the number of things accomplished and irrevocable. It was simply the thing she had to do.

It possessed her now; and under its dominion she was uplifted, carried along. Her mind moved toward it with a reckless rocking speed, the perilous certainty of the insane.

At five o'clock she rang the bell and asked the servant to bring her some tea. She swallowed a little with a jerk of her throat,

and put the cup down, shuddering. It brought her a sickening memory of yesterday.

At five o'clock she got up and dressed herself and sent a message to Robert Lucy to see her downstairs in her sitting-room, alone. As she stood at her glass she said to herself, "How shocking I look. But he won't mind."

At six he was with her.

She drew her hand away from his as if his touch had hurt her. Her smile was the still, bloodless smile that comes with pain. She drew her chair back out of the sunlight, in the recess by the fireplace. He stood beside her then, looking at her with eyes that loved her the more for the sad hurt to her beauty. His manner recalled the shy, adolescent uncertainty of his first approaches.

"Don't you think," he said, "you ought to have stayed in bed?"

She shook her head and struggled to find her voice. It came convulsively.

"No. I 'm better. I 'm all right now."

"It was being out in that beastly hot sun yesterday — with those youngsters. You 're not used to it."

She laughed. "No. I 'm not used to it. Robert — you have n't told them, have you?"

"What?"

"About you — and me?"

"No. Not yet. He smiled. "I say, I shall have to tell them very soon, shan't I?"

"You need n't."

He made some inarticulate sound that questioned her.

"I 've changed my mind. I can't marry you."

He had to bend his head to catch her low, indistinct murmur; but he caught it.

He drew back from her, and leaned against the chimneypiece and looked at her more intently than before.

"Do you mean," he said quietly, "because of *them*?"

"Yes."

He looked down.

"Poor Kitty," he said. "You think I 'm asking too much of you?"

She did not answer.

"You 're afraid?"

"I told you I was afraid."

"Yes. But I thought it was all right. I thought you liked them."

She was silent. Tears rose to her eyes and hung on their unsteady lashes.

"They like you."

She bowed her head and the tears fell.

"Is that what has upset you?"

"Yes."

"I see. You 've been thinking it over and you find you can't stand it. I don't wonder. You 've let those little monkeys tire you out. You 've nearly got a sunstroke and you feel as if you 'd rather die than go through another day like yesterday? Well, you shan't. There 'll never be another day like yesterday."

"No. Never," she said; and her sobs choked her.

"Why should there be? They 'll have a

governess. You don't suppose I meant you to have them on your hands all the time?"

She went on crying softly. He sat on the arm of her chair and put his arm round her and dried her eyes.

"Don't be unhappy about it, Kitty. I understand. You 're not marrying them, dear; you 're marrying me."

She broke loose from him.

"I can't marry you," she cried. "I can't give you what you want."

"Do you mean that you can't care for me? Is that what you 're trying to tell me all the time?"

He moved and she cowered back into her chair.

"I — I *can't* tell you."

He had turned from her. He was leaning his arms along the mantelshelf; he had bowed his head on them.

They remained for some minutes so; she cowering back; he with his face hidden from her.

"Do you mind telling me," he said presently, "if there 's anybody else that you ——"

"That I care for? No, Robert, there 's no one."

"Are you quite sure? Quite honest. Think."

"Do you mean Wilfrid Marston?"

"Yes."

"I certainly do not care for *him*."

He raised his head at that; but he did not look at her.

"Thank God!" he said.

"Do you think as badly of him as all that?"

"Don't ask me what I think of him."

"Would you think badly of me if I 'd married him?"

"I —I could n't have stood it, Kitty."

"I am not going to marry him."

"You have n't said yet that you don't care for me?"

"No. I have n't."

He turned and stooped over her, compelling her to look at him.

"Say it then," he said.

She drew back her face from his and put up her hands between them. He rose and stood before her and looked down at her. The blue of her eyes had narrowed, the pupils stared at him, black and feverish. Her mouth, which had been tight-shut, was open slightly. A thin flush blurred its edges. Her breath came through, short and sharp.

"You 're ill," he said. You must go back to bed."

"No," she said. "I 've got to tell you something."

"If you do I shan't believe it."

"What won't you believe?"

"That you don't care for me. I can't believe it."

"You 'd better, Robert."

"I don't. There 's something wrong. You must tell me what it is."

"There 's nothing wrong but that. I — I made a mistake."

"You only thought you liked me? Or is it worse than that?"

"It 's worse, far worse."

"I see. You tried to like me, and you could n't?"

She was silent.

"Poor child. I 've been a selfish brute. I might have known you could n't. You 've hardly known me ten days. But if I wait, Kitty — if I give you time to think?"

"If you give me ten years it would do no good."

"I see," he said; "I see."

He gripped the edge of the mantelpiece with both his hands; his tense arms trembled from the shoulders to the wrists; his hold relaxed. He straightened himself and hid his shaking hands in his coat pockets. There were tears at the edges of his eyelids, the small, difficult tears that cut their way through the flesh that abhors them.

She saw them.

"Ah, Robert—do you care for me like that?"

"You know how I care for you."

He stopped as he swung away from her, remembering that he had failed in courtesy.

"Thank you," he said, simply, "for telling me the truth."

He reached the door, and she rose and came after him. He shook his head as a sign to her not to follow him. She saw that he was going from her because he was tortured and dumb with suffering and with shame.

Then she knew what she must do. She called to him, she entreated.

"Robert — don't go. Come back — come back. I can't bear it."

He came back at that cry.

"I have n't told you the truth. I lied."

"When?" he said sternly.

"Just now. When I told you that I did n't care for you."

"Well?"

"Sit down — here, on the sofa. I 'll try and tell you."

He sat down beside her, but not near.

She leaned forward with her elbows on her knees, and her head propped on her clenched hands. She did not look at him as she spoke.

"I said I did n't care, because I thought that was the easiest way out of it. Easiest for you. So much easier than knowing the truth."

He smiled grimly.

"Well, you see how easy it 's been."

"Yes." She paused. "The truth is n't going to be easy either."

"Let 's have it, all the same, Kitty."

"You 're going to have it." She paused again, breathing hard. "Have you never wondered why the people here avoided me? You know they thought things."

"As if it mattered what they thought."

"They were right. There *was* something."

She heard him draw a deep breath. He, too, leaned forward now, in the same attitude as she, as if he were the participator of her confession, and the accomplice of her shame. His face was level with hers, but his eyes

looked straight past her, untainted and clear.

"What if there was?" he said. "It makes no difference."

She turned her sad face to his.

"Don't you know, Robert? Don't you know?"

He frowned impatiently.

"No, I don't. I don't want to."

"You 'd rather think I did n't care for you?"

His face set again in its tortured, dumb look.

"You shan't think that of me."

She leaned back again out of his sight, and he presented to her his shoulder, thrust forward, and his profile, immovable, dogged, and apparently unheeding.

"It 's because I cared for you that I could n't tell you the truth. I tried and could n't. It was so difficult, and you *would n't* understand. Then Wilfrid Marston said I must — I had to tell you."

He threw himself back and turned on her.

"What had Marston to do with it?"

Her voice and her eyes dropped.

"You see, he knew."

"I see."

He waited.

" I could n't tell you."

His silence conveyed to her that he listened since she desired it, that he left it to her to tell him as much or as little as she would, and that thus he trusted her.

"I was afraid," she said.

"What? Afraid of *me*, Kitty?'

"I thought it would make you not care for me."

"I don't think anything you can tell me will make any difference."

"You said yourself it would. You said you would n't marry me if I was n't nice."

He looked up impatient and surprised.

"But we 've been through all that," he said.

"No, we have n't. When I said I was n't nice I meant there were things I ——"

"Well?"

"I — I was n't married to Charley Tailleur."

He took it in silence; and through the silence she let it sink in.

"Where is the fellow?" he asked presently.

"He 's dead. I told you *that*."

"I 'd forgotten,"

There was another silence.

"Did you care for him very much, Kitty?"

"I don't know. Yes. No, I don't know. It was n't the same thing."

"Never mind. It 's very good of you to tell me."

"I did n't mean to."

"What made you tell me?"

"Seeing the children. I thought I could go on deceiving you; but when I saw them I knew I could n't."

"I see." His voice softened. "You told me because of them. I 'm glad you told me." He paused on that.

"Well," he said, "we must make the best of it."

"That makes no difference?"

"No. Not now."

She sighed.

"How long ago was it?" he asked.

"Five years. Charley Tailleur was the first."

"What?"

"The first. There were others; ever so many others. I 'm — that sort."

"I don't believe you."

"You 've got to believe me. You can't marry me, and you 've got to see why."

She also paused. Her silences were terrible to him.

"I thought you did see once. It did n't seem possible that you could n't. Do you remember the first time I met you?"

He remembered.

"I thought you saw then. And afterward—don't you remember how you followed me out of the room — another night?"

"Yes."

"I thought you understood, and were too shy to say so. But you did n't. *Then* — do

you remember how I waited for you at the end of the garden? — and how we sat out on the Cliff? I was trying then — the way I always try. I thought I 'd make you — and you — you would n't see it. You only wanted to help me. You were so innocent and dear. That 's what made me love you."

"Oh," he groaned. "Don't."

But she went on. "And do you remember how you found me — that night — out on the Cliff?"

She drew back her voice softly.

"I was sure then that you knew, and that when you asked me to come back with you ——"

"Look here, Kitty, I 've had enough of it."

"You have n't, for you 're fond of me still. You are, are n't you?"

"Oh, my God! how do I know?"

"*I* know. It 's because you have n't taken it in. What do you think of this? You 've known me ten days, and ten days before that I was with Wilfrid Marston."

"'I want to make you loathe me . . . . never see me again.'"

He had taken it in at last. She had made it real to him, clothed it in flesh and blood.

"If you don't believe me," she said, "ask him. That 's what he came to see me for. He wanted me to go back to him. In fact, I was n't supposed to have left him."

He put his hand to his forehead as if he were trying to steady his mind to face the thing that stunned it.

"And you 're telling me all this because ——" he said dully.

"Because I want to make you loathe me, so that you can go away and be glad that you 'll never see me again. And if it hurts you too much to think of me as I am, to think that you cared for me, just say to yourself that I cared for *you*, and that I could n't have done it if I 'd been quite bad."

She cried out, "It would have been better for me if I had been. I should n't *feel* then. It would n't hurt me to see little children. I should have got over that long ago; and I should n't have cared for you or them. I

should n't have been able to. We get like that. And then — I need n't have let you care for me. That was the worst thing I ever did. But I was so happy — so happy."

He could not look at her; he covered his face with his hands, and she knew that he cared still.

Then she came and knelt down beside him and whispered. He got up and broke away from her and she followed him.

"You can't marry me *now*," she said.

And he answered, "No."

CHAPTER XIX

HE DID not leave her. They sat still, separated by the length of the little room, staring, not at each other, but at some point in the distance, as if each brain had flung and fixed there the same unspeakable symbol of its horror.

Her face was sharp with pain, was strangely purified, spiritualised by the immortal moment that uplifted her. His face, grown old in a moment, had lost its look of glad and incorruptible innocence.

Not that he was yet in full possession of reality. His mind was sunk in the stupor that follows after torture. It kept its hold by one sense only, the vague discerning of profound responsibility, and of something profounder still, some tie binding him to Kitty, immaterial, indestructible, born of their communion in pain.

It kept him by its intangible compulsion, sitting there in the same small room, divided from her, but still there, still wearing that strange air of participation, of complicity.

And all the time he kept saying to himself, "What next?"

There was a knock at the door.

"It 's Jane," he said. "I 'll tell her not to come in. His voice sounded hoarse and unlike his own.

"Oh, may n't I see her?"

He looked up with his clouded eyes. "Do you want to?"

"Yes."

He considered. He hesitated.

"Do you mind?"

"Mind?" he repeated. As if, after what they had gone through, there could ever be anything to mind. It seemed to him that things would always henceforth be insubstantial, and events utterly unimportant. He tried with an immense effort to grasp

this event of Jane's appearance and of Kitty's attitude to Jane.

"I thought," he said, "perhaps she would bother you."

The knock came again.

"Robert," she said, "I don't want her to know — what I told you."

"Of course not," he said. "Come in."

Jane came in and closed the door behind her. She had a letter folded tightly in her hand. She stood there a moment, looking from one to the other. It was Kitty who spoke.

"Come in, Janey," she said. "I want you."

Jane came forward and stood between them. She looked at Robert who hardened his face, and at Kitty who was trembling.

"Has anything happened?" she said.

And Kitty answered, "No. Nothing will happen now. I've just told him that it can't."

"You've given him up?"

"Yes. I've—given—him up."

She drew in her breath on the "Yes," so that it sounded like a sob. The other words came slowly from her, one by one, as if she repeated them by rote, without knowing what they meant.

Jane turned to her brother. "And you've let her do it?"

He was silent, still saying to himself, "What next?"

"Of course he's let me. He knows it was the only thing I could do."

"Kitty—what made you do it?"

Kitty closed her eyes. Robert saw her and gave a low inarticulate sound of misery. Jane heard it and understood.

"Kitty," she said, "have you made him believe you don't care for him?"

She sat down on the couch beside her and covered her hands with her own.

"It isn't true, Robert," she said. "She doesn't know what she's doing. Kitty, tell him it isn't true."

The trembling hands broke loose from her. Kitty sobbed once and was still. At the sound Robert turned on Jane.

"Leave her alone," he said, "she does n't want to be bothered about it now."

Kitty's hand moved back along the couch to Jane. "No," she said, "don't make her leave me. I 'm going away soon."

He started to that answer to his question, "What next?"

"Tell me what made you do it?" said Jane again.

"Whatever it was," he said, "she 's doing perfectly right."

"I know what she 's doing. And I know why she 's doing it. Can't you see why?"

Robert, who had stood still looking at her helplessly, turned away at the direct appeal and walked up and down, up and down, the room. He was still saying to himself, "And if she goes, what next?"

"She does n't mean it, Robert. It 's these wretched people who have driven her to it

with the abominable things they 've said and thought. You *can't* let her give you up. Don't you see that it 'll look as if you did n't believe in her? And he does believe in you, Kitty dear. He does n't care what anybody says."

Kitty spoke. "Leave it alone, Janey. You don't know what you 're talking about. You don't even know what it is they say."

"I do," said Jane. She rose and went to her brother and thrust the letter she held into his hand. "Look there, that came just now."

He glanced at the letter, lit a match and set fire to it and dropped the ashes into the grate.

"Look at him, Kitty, look at him," she cried triumphantly.

"What was in that letter?"

"Nothing that matters"

"Who wrote it?"

"Nobody who matters in the very least."

"Was it Mr. Marston? Tell me."

"No."

"He would n't," said Kitty thoughtfully. It 's women who write letters. It must have been Grace Keating. She hates me."

"I know she hates you. Do you see now why Kitty 's giving you up?"

"She has told me herself, Janey. She may have more reasons than you know."

"She has none, none that I don't know. They 're all there in that letter which you 've burnt. Can't you see why it was written?"

"Does it matter why?"

"Yes, it does matter. It was written to make you give Kitty up. There 's no reason why I should spare the woman who wrote it. She hates Kitty — because she wanted you for herself. Kitty knows that she 's slandered her. She did it before she went, to her face, and Kitty forgave her. And now the poor child thinks that she 'll let you go, and just creep away quietly and hide herself — from *that.* And you 'll let her do

it? You believe her when she says she does n't care for you? It that is n't caring — Why it 's *because* she cares for you, and cares for your honour more than she does for her own, poor darling ——"

"I know, Janey. And she knows I know."

"Then where 's your precious honour if you don't stand up for her? She 's got nobody but you, and if you don't defend her from that sort of thing ——"

She stood before him, flaming, and Kitty rose and put herself between them.

"He can't defend me, Janey. It 's the truth."

CHAPTER XX

SHE had left them to each other. It was eight o'clock. She had crept back again to the bed that was her refuge, where she had lain for the last hour, weeping to exhaustion. She had raised herself at the touch of a hand on her hot forehead. Jane was standing beside her.

"Kitty," she said, "will you see Robert for a moment? He 's waiting for you downstairs, in your room."

Kitty dropped back again on her pillow with her arm over her face, warding off Jane's gaze.

"No," she said, "I can't see him. I can't go through that again."

"But, Kitty, there 's something he wants to say to you."

"There 's nothing he can say. Nothing — nothing. Tell him I 'm going away."

"You must n't go without seeing him."

"I must. It 's the only way."

"For you — yes. How about him?"

Kitty sighed. She stirred irresolutely on her pillow.

"No, no," she said. "I 've done it once. I can't do it all over again."

"I suppose," said Jane, "it *is* easier — not to see him."

At that Kitty clenched her hands.

"Easier?" she cried. "I 'd give my soul to see him for one minute — one minute, Janey."

She turned, stifling her sobs on her pillow. They ceased, and the passion that was in her had its way then. She lay on her face, convulsed, biting into the pillow; gripping the sheets, tearing at them and wringing them in her hands. Her whole body writhed, shaken and tormented.

"Oh, go away!" she cried. "Go away. Don't look at me!"

But Jane did not go. She stood there by the bedside.

She had come to the end of her adventure. It was as if she had been brought there blindfold, carried past the border into the terrible, alien, unpenetrated lands. Her genius for exploration had never taken her within reasonable distance of them. She had turned back when the frontier was in sight, refusing all knowledge of the things that lay beyond. And here she was, in the very thick of it, at the heart of the unexplored, with her poor terrified eyes uncovered, her face held close to the thing she feared. And yet she had passed through the initiation without terror; she had held her hand in the strange fire and it had not hurt her. She felt only a great penetrating, comprehending, incorruptible pity for her sister who writhed there, consumed and tortured in the flame.

She knelt by the bedside and stretched out her arm and covered her, and Kitty lay still.

"You have n't gone?" she said.

"No, Kitty."

Kitty moved; she sat up and put her hands to her loosened hair.

"I 'll see him now," she said.

Kitty slid her feet to the floor. She stood up, steadying herself by the bedside.

Jane looked at her, and her heart was wrung with compassion.

"No," she said, "wait till you 're better. I 'll tell him."

But Kitty was before her at the door, leaning against it.

"I shall never be better," she said. Her smile was ghastly. She turned to Jane on the open threshold. "He has n't got the children with him, has he? I don't want to see them."

"You won't see them."

"Can't he come to me?"

She peered down the passage and drew back, and Jane knew that she was afraid of being seen.

"There 's nobody about," she said, "they 're all in the dining-room."

Still Kitty hesitated.

"Will you come with me?" she said.

Then Jane took her hand and led her to the room where Robert was, and left her with him.

He stood by the hearth, waiting for her. His head was bowed, but his eyes, as she entered, lifted and fixed themselves on her. There had gone from him that air of radiant and unconquerable youth, of innocence, expectant and alert. Instead of it he too wore the mark of experience, of initiation that had meant torture.

"I hope," he said, "you are rested."

"Oh yes."

She stood there, weak and drooping, leaning her weight on one slender hand, spread palm downward on the table.

He drew out a chair for her, and removed his own to the other side of the table, keeping that barrier between them. In his whole manner there was a terrible constraint.

"You 've eaten nothing," he said.

Neither had he, she gathered, nor Jane.

The trouble she had brought on them was jarring, dislocating, like the shock of bereavement. They had behaved as if in the presence of the beloved dead.

And yet, though he held himself apart, she knew that he had not sent for her to cast her off: that he was yet bound to her by the mysterious, infrangible tie: that he seemed to himself, in some way, her partner and accomplice.

Their silence was a link that bound them, and she broke it.

"Well," she said, "you have something to say to me?"

"Yes" — his hands, spread out on the table between them, trembled — "I have, only it seems so little ——"

"Does it? Well, of course, there is n't much to be said."

"Not much. There are n't any words. Only, I don't want you to think that I don't realise what you 've done. It was magnificent."

He answered her look of stupefied inquiry.

"Your courage, Kitty, in telling me the truth."

"Oh, *that*. Don't let 's talk about it."

"I am not going to talk about it. But I want you to understand that what you told me has made no difference in my — in my feeling for you."

"It must."

"It has n't. And it never will. And I want to know what we 're going to do next."

"Next?" she repeated.

"Yes, next. *Now*."

"I 'm going away. There 's nothing else left for me to do."

"And I, Kitty? Do you think I 'm going to let you go, without ——"

She stopped him.

"You can't help yourself."

"What? You think I 'm brute enough to take everything you 've given me, and to — to let you go like this?"

His hands moved as if they would have taken hers and held them. Then he drew back.

"There 's one thing I can't do for you, Kitty. I can't marry you, because it would n't be fair to my children."

"I know, Robert, I know."

"I know you know. I told you nothing would ever make any difference. If it were n't for them I 'd ask you to marry me to-morrow. I 'm only giving you up as you 're giving me up, because of them. But if I can't marry you, I want you to let me make things a little less hard for you."

"How?"

"Well, for one thing, I don't believe you 've anything to live on."

"What makes you think that?"

"Marston told me that if you married you forfeited your income. I suppose that meant that you had nothing of your own."

"It did."

"You 've nothing?"

"My father would give me fifty pounds

a year if I kept straight. But he can't afford it. It means that my little sisters go without dresses."

"And you 've no home, Kitty?"

She shook her head.

"They can't have me at home, you see." He sighed.

"If I looked after you, Kitty, do you think you would keep straight? If I made a home for you, somewhere, where you won't be too unhappy?"

"You mean you 'd take care of me?"

"Yes. As far as I can."

Her face flushed deeply.

"No." she said. "No. I must n't let you do that."

"Why not? It 's nothing, Kitty. It 's the least that I can do. And you 'd be very lonely."

"I would. I would be miserable — in between."

"Between?"

"When you were n't there."

"Kitty, dear child, I can't be there."

She shrank back, the flush died out of her face and left it white.

"I see. You did n't mean that I was to live with you?"

"Poor child — no."

"I — I did n't understand."

"No," he said gently, "no."

"You see how hopeless I am?"

"I see what my responsibility would be if I left you to yourself."

"And — *what* do you want to do?"

"I want to provide for you and your future."

"Dear Robert, you can't possibly provide — for either."

"I can. I 've got a little house in the country, if you 'll take it, and I can spare enough out of my income."

She smiled.

"You can't afford it."

"If I could afford to marry, I could afford that."

"I see. It 's a beautiful scheme, Robert. And in the little house where I 'm to live, you will come sometimes, and see me?"

"I think it would be better not."

"And what am I to do, if — if things are too hard for me? And if you are the only one ——?"

"*Then* you 're to send for me."

"I see. I 've only to send for you and you 'll come?"

"Of course I 'll come."

"When I can't bear it any longer, am I to send for you?"

"You 're to send for me when you 're in any trouble, or any difficulty — or any danger."

"And the way out of the trouble — and the difficulty — and the danger?"

"Between us we shall find the way."

"No, Robert. Between us we shall lose it. And we shall never, never find it again."

"You can't trust me, Kitty?"

"I can't trust myself. I know how your

scheme would work. I let you do this thing; I go away and live in the dear little house you 'll give me; and I let you keep me there, and give me all my clothes and things. And you think that 's the way to stop me thinking about you and caring for you? I shall be there, eating my heart out. What else can I do, when everything I put on or have about me reminds me of you, every minute of the day? I 'm to look to you for everything, but never to see you until I can bear it no longer. How long do you think I shall bear it? A woman made like me? You know perfectly well what the trouble and the difficulty and the danger is. I shall be in it all the time. And some day I shall send for you and you 'll come. Oh yes, you 'll come; for you 'll be in it, too. It won't be a bit easier for you than it is for me."

She paused.

"You 'll come. And you know what the end of that will be."

"You think no other end is possible between a man and a woman?"

"If I do, it 's men who have made me think it."

"Have *I*, Kitty?"

"No, not you. I don't say your plan would n't work with some other woman. I say it 's impossible between you — and me."

"Because you won't believe that I might behave differently from some other men?"

"You *are* different. And I mean to keep you so."

She rose.

"There 's only one way," she said. "We must never see each other again. We must n't even *think*. I shall go away, and you 're not to come after me."

"When?"

"To-morrow. Perhaps to-night."

"And where, Kitty?"

"I don't know."

"You shan't go," he said. "I 'll go.

You must stay here until we can think of something."

She closed her eyes and drew a hard sigh, as if exhausted with the discussion.

"Robert, dear, would you mind not talking any more to me? I 'm very tired."

"If I leave you will you go to bed and rest?"

"I think so. You can say good night."

He rose and came toward her.

"No — don't say it!" she cried. "Don't speak to me!"

She drew back and put her hands behind her as a sign that he was not to touch her.

He stood for a moment looking at her. And as he looked at her he was afraid, even as she was. He said to himself that in that moment she was wise and had done well. For his heart hardly knew its pity from its passion, and its passion from its fear.

And she, seeing that she stood between him and the door, turned aside and made his way clear for him.

And so he left her.

CHAPTER XXI

SHE stared at her own face in the glass without seeing it. Her brain was filled with the loud, hurried ticking of the clock. It sounded somehow as if it were out of gear. She felt herself swaying slightly as she stood.

She was not going to faint bodily. It seemed to her rather that the immaterial bonds, the unseen, subtle, intimate connections were letting go their hold. Her soul was the heart of the danger. It was there that the travelling powers of dissolution, accelerated, multiplying, had begun their work and would end it. Its moments were not measured by the ticking of the clock.

She had remained standing as Lucy had left her, with her back to the door he had gone out by. She was thus unaware that a servant of the hotel had come in, that he

had delivered some message and was waiting for her answer.

She started as the man spoke to her again. With a great effort her brain grasped and repeated what he had said.

"Mr. Marston."

No; she was certainly not going to faint. There was no receding of sensation. It was resurgence and invasion, violence shaking the very doors of life. She heard the light, tremulous tread of the little pulses of her body, scattered by the ringing hammer strokes of her heart and brain. She heard the clock ticking out of gear, like the small, irritable pulse of time.

She steadied her voice to answer.

"Very well. Show him in."

Marston's face, as he approached her, was harder and stiffer than ever; his bearing more uncompromisingly upright and correct. He greeted her with that peculiar deference that he showed to women whose acquaintance he had yet to make. Decency

required that he should start on a fresh and completely purified footing with the future Mrs. Robert Lucy.

"It 's charming of you," he said, "to let me come in."

"I wanted to see you, Wilfrid."

Something in her tone made him glance at her with a look that restored her, for a moment, to her former place.

"That is still more charming," he replied.

"I 've done what you told me. I 've given him up."

A heavy flush spread over his face and relaxed the hard tension of the muscles.

"I thought you 'd do it."

"Well, I have done it." She paused. "That 's all I had to say to you."

Her voice struck at him like a blow. But he bore it well, smiling his hard, reticent smile.

"I knew you 'd do it," he repeated; "but I did n't think you 'd do it quite so soon. Why did you?"

"You know why."

"I did n't mean to put pressure on you, Kitty. It was *your* problem. Still, I 'm glad you 've seen it in the right light."

"You think you made me see it?"

"I should hope you 'd see it for yourself. It was obvious."

"What was obvious?"

"The unsuitability of the entire arrangement. Was it likely you 'd stick to it when you saw what you were in for?"

"You think I tired of him?"

"I think you saw possibilities of fatigue; and, like a wise child, you chucked it. It 's as well you did it before instead of after. I say, how did Lucy take it?"

She did not answer. His smile flickered and died under the oppression of her silence.

"Have you done with him altogether?" He did n't suggest — er — any compromise?"

"He did not."

"He would n't. Compromise is foreign to his nature."

He sat leaning forward, contemplating, with apparent satisfaction, his own strong-grained, immaculate hands. From time to time he tapped the floor with a nervous movement of his foot.

"Then," he said presently, "if that 's so, there 's no reason, is there, why you should n't come back to me?"

"I can't come back to you. I told you so yesterday."

"Since yesterday the situation has altered considerably; or rather, it remains precisely where it was before."

"No, Wilfrid; things can never be as they were before."

"Why not? — if I choose to ignore this episode, this little aberration on your part. You must be equally anxious to forget it. In which case we may consider our relations uninterrupted."

"Do you think I gave Robert Lucy up to go back to you?"

"My dear Kitty, if I 'm willing to take

you back after you gave *me* up for him, I think my attitude almost constitutes a claim.

"A claim?"

"Well, let's say it entitles me to a hearing. You don't seem to realise, in the least, my extreme forbearance. I never reproached you. I never interfered between you and Lucy. You can't say I did n't play the game."

"I 'm not saying it. I know you did n't betray me."

"Betray you? My dear child, I helped you. I never dreamed of standing in your way as long as there was a chance of your marrying. Now that there is none ——"

"That has nothing to do with it. I told you that I would n't go back to you in any case."

"Come, I don't propose to throw you over for any other woman. Surely it would be more decent to come back to me than

to go off with some other man, heaven knows whom, which is what you must do — eventually?"

"It 's what I won't do. I 'm not going back to *that*. Don't you see that 's why I won't go back to you?"

Her apathy had become exhaustion. The flat, powerless voice, dying of its own utterance, gave him a sense of things past and done with, sunk into the ultimate oblivion. No voice of her energy and defiance could have touched him so. Her indifference troubled him like passion; in its completeness, its finality, it stirred him to decision, to acceptance of its terms. She was ready to fall from his grasp by her own dead weight. There was only one way in which he could hold her.

"Kitty," he said, "is that really why you won't come back?"

"Yes; that 's why. Anything — anything but that."

"I see. You 're tired of it? And you

want to give it up? Well, I 'm not sure that I don't want you to."

"Then why," she moaned, "why won't you let me go?"

"Simply because I can't. I 've tried it, Kitty. I can't."

He came and sat close to her. He leaned his face to hers and spoke thickly and low.

"You can't give it up, dear. You 're bound to go back."

"No — no — no. Don't talk about it."

"I won't. I won't ask you to go back; but I can't do without you."

"Oh yes, you can. There are other women."

"I loathe them all. I would n't do for one of them what I 'll do for you."

"What will you do for me?"

"I 'll marry you, Kitty."

She laughed in her tired fashion. "You want to make an honest woman of me, do you?"

"No. I think I 'm endeavouring to make

myself an honest man. If you give Lucy up for me I don't want you to lose by the transaction. You were to have been married; but for me perhaps, you would have been. Very well, I 'll marry you."

"And that," said she, "will make it all right?"

"Well, won't it?"

"No, it won't. How could it?"

"You know how. It will help you to keep straight. That 's what you want, is n't it?"

"Oh yes, that 's what I *want*. And you think I 'll keep straight by marrying you?"

"I won't swear to it. But I know it 's ten to one that you 'll go to the devil if you don't marry me. And you say you don't want to do that."

"I don't want — to marry you."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps not; but even marrying me might be better than the other alternative."

"It would n't," she cried. "It would be

worse. If I married you I could n't get away from you. I could n't get away from *it*. You 'd keep me in it. It 's what you like me for — what you 're marrying me for. You have n't married, all these years, because you can't stand living with a decent woman. And you think, if I marry you, it will make it all right. All right!"

She rose and defied him. "Why, I 'd rather be your mistress. Then I could get away from you. I shall get away now.

She turned violently, and he leaped up and caught her in his arms. She struggled, beating upon his breast, and crying with a sad, inarticulate cry. She would have sunk to the floor if he had not kept his hold of her.

He raised her, and she stood still, breathing hard, while he still grasped her tightly by the wrists.

"Let me go," she said faintly.

"Where are you going to?"

"I don't know."

"You 've no money. If you 're not going back what are you going to do?"

"I don't know."

Her eyelids dropped, and he saw mendacity in her eyes' furtive fleeing under cover. He held her tighter. His arm shook her, not brutally, but with a nervous movement that he was powerless to control.

"You lie," he said. "You 've been lying to me all the time. You *are* going back. You 're going to that fellow Lucy."

"No. I 'm going — somewhere — where I shan't see him."

"Where?"

"I don't know."

"Abroad?"

"I think so."

"By yourself?"

Her eyelids quivered, and she panted. "Yes."

There was a knock at the door.

"Let me go," she said again.

He let her go.

"You 're going to live — by yourself — respectably — abroad?"

She was silent.

"And how long do you think that will last?"

"I don't know."

Jane Lucy's voice called her from the door. He swore under his breath.

"Let her come in. I want her."

He laid his hand upon the door.

"What are you going to do?" he reiterated.

"Oh, let her come to me."

"You have n't answered my question."

"Let me see her first. Leave me alone with her. Janey! Janey!" she called.

"Very well," he said.

He opened the door and bowed to Jane Lucy as she entered.

"I shall come back," he said, "for my answer."

CHAPTER XXII

"DID Robert send you?" she asked, when she was alone with Jane.

"Yes."

"It 's no good. I can't do what he wants."

"What are you going to do, dear?"

"I don't know. I don't care. The terrible thing is that I 've had to hurt him. I must go away somewhere."

"I 'll come with you and see you through."

Kitty shook her head.

"Don't think about it now," said Jane.

"No; I can't think. I 'm too tired, and my head 's hot. But if I go away you 'll understand why I did it?"

"Kitty" — Jane whispered it — "you won't go back?"

"No. I won't go back. You won't have to think that of me."

She had not looked at Jane as they talked.

Now she turned to her with eyes of anguish and appeal.

"Janey — think. I've been wicked for years and years. I've only been good for one moment. One moment — when I gave Robert up. Do you think it'll count?"

"I think that, in the sight of God, such moments last forever."

"And that's what you'll think of me by?"

She lifted up her face, haggard and white, flame-spotted where her tears had scorched it. Jane kissed it.

"Do you mind kissing me?"

"My dear, my dear," said Jane, and she drew her closer.

There was a sound of footsteps in the passage. Kitty drew back and listened.

"Where's Robert?"

"Upstairs with the children."

"They'll be asleep by this time, won't they?"

"Fast asleep."

The footsteps came again, approaching the door. They paused outside it a moment and turned back.

"Do you hear that?" said Kitty. "It 's Wilfrid Marston walking up and down. He wants to get hold of me. I think he 's mad about me. He asked me to marry him just now, and I would n't. He thinks I did n't mean it, and he 's coming back for his answer. But I 'll tell you what I 'm going to do. I shall go out quietly by the window and slip away, and he won't find me. I want you to be here when he comes, and tell him that he can't see me. Would you mind doing that?"

"No."

"You 'll stay here all the time, and you won't let him go out and look for me?"

"Yes."

Kitty listened again for the footsteps.

"He 's still there," she whispered.

"And you 'll go to bed, Kitty?"

"Yes: of course I will."

She went out through the window on to the veranda, and so on into the garden.

It was cool out there and unutterably peaceful, with a tender, lucid twilight on the bare grass of the lawn, on the sea beyond it, and on the white gravel path by the low wall between. She saw it, the world that had held her and Robert, that, holding them, had taken on the ten days' splendour of their passion. It stood, divinely still in the perishing violet light, a world withdrawn and unsubstantial, yet piercingly, intolerably near.

Indoors Jane waited. It was not yet the half-hour. She waited till the clock struck and Marston came for his answer.

He looked round the room, and his face, under its deference, betrayed his sharp annoyance at finding himself alone with Miss Lucy.

"Pardon me," he said, "I thought that Mrs Tailleur was here."

"Mrs Tailleur asked me to tell you that

she cannot see you. She has gone to her room."

"To her room?"

He stared at her, and his face loosened in a sudden incredulity and dismay.

"Did she tell you she was going there?"

"Yes. She was very tired."

"But — she was here not half an hour ago. She could n't have gone without my seeing her."

"She went out," said Jane faintly, "by the window."

"She could n't get to her room without going through the hall. I 've been there all the time on the seat by the stairs."

They looked at each other The seat by the stairs commanded all ways in and out, the entrance of the passage, and the door of the sitting-room, and the portière of the lounge.

"What do you think?" he said.

"I think that she has not gone far. But if she goes, it is you who will have driven her away."

"Forgive me if I remind you that it is not I who have given her up."

"It was you," said Jane quietly, "who helped to ruin her."

His raised eyebrows expressed an urbane surprise at the curious frankness of her charge. And with a delicate gesture of his hand he repudiated it and waved it away.

"My dear lady, you are alarmed and you are angry, consequently you are unjust. Whatever poor Kitty may have done I am not responsible."

"You are responsible. It 's you, and men like you, who have dragged her down. You took advantage of her weakness, of her very helplessness. You 've made her so that she can't believe in a man's goodness and trust herself to it."

He smiled, still with that untroubled urbanity, on the small flaming thing as she arraigned him.

"And you consider me responsible for that?" he said.

Their eyes met. "My brother is here," said she. "Would you like to see him?"

"It might be as well, perhaps. If you can find him."

She left him, and he waited five minutes ten minutes, twenty.

She returned alone. All her defiance had gone from her, and the face that she turned to him was white with fear.

"She is not here," she said "She went out — by that window — and she has not come in. We 've searched the hotel, and we can't find her."

"And you have *not* found your brother?"

"He has gone out to look for her."

She sat down by the table, turning her face away and screening it from him with her hand.

Marston gave one look at her. He stepped out, and crossed the lawn to the bottom of the garden. The gate at the end of the path there swung open violently, and he found himself face to face with Robert Lucy.

"What have you done with Mrs. Tailleur?" he said.

Lucy's head was sunk upon his breast. He did not look at him nor answer. The two men walked back in silence up the lawn.

"You don't know where she is?" said Marston presently.

"No. I thought I did. But — she is not there."

He paused, steadying his voice to speak again.

"If I don't find her, I shall go up to town by the midnight train. Can you give me her address there?"

"You think she has gone up to town?" Marston spoke calmly. He was appeased by Lucy's agitation and his manifest ignorance as to Kitty's movements.

"There 's nothing else she could do. I 've got to find her. Will you be good enough to give me her address?"

"My dear Mr. Lucy, there 's really no reason why I should. If Mrs. Tailleur has

not gone up to town, her address won't help you. If she has gone, your discreetest course by far, if I may say so ——"

"Is what?" said Lucy sternly.

"Why, my dear fellow, of course — to let her go."

Lucy raised his head. "I do not intend," he said, "to let her go."

"Nor I," said Marston.

"Then we 've neither of us any time to lose. I won't answer for what she may do, in the state she 's in."

Marston swung slightly round, so that he faced Lucy with his imperturbable stare.

"If you 'd known Mrs. Tailleur as long as I have you 'd have no sort of doubt as to what she 'll do."

Lucy did not appear to have heard him, so sunk was he in his own thoughts.

"What was that?" said Marston suddenly.

They listened. The gate of the Cliff path creaked on its hinges and fell back with a sharp click of the latch. Lucy turned and

saw a small woman's figure entering the garden from the Cliff. He strode on toward the house, unwilling to be observed and overtaken by any guests of the hotel.

Marston followed him slowly, pondering at each step of the way.

He heard footsteps, quick stumbling footsteps, and a sound like a hoarse, half-suffocating breath behind him. Then a woman's voice, that sank, stumbling, like the footsteps, as it spoke.

"Mr. Lucy," it said, "is it you?"

Marston went on.

Lucy was in the room with his sister. He was sitting with his back to the open window as Marston came in by it.

The voice outside was nearer; it whispered, "Where is Mr. Lucy?"

"Somebody's looking for you, Lucy," said Marston.

And the three turned round.

Mrs. Hankin stood in the window, holding on to the frame of it and trembling.

Her face, her perfect face, was gray, like the face of an old woman. It was drawn and disfigured with some terrible emotion.

Lucy went to her. She clung to his arm. and held him on the threshold.

"Mrs. Tailleur," she said, "Mrs. Tailleur. We found her — down there. She 's killed. She — she fell from the Cliff."

The three stood still as she spoke to them.

Then Jane rushed forward to her brother with a cry, and Mrs. Hankin stretched out her arms and barred the way.

There were small spots of blood on her hands and on her dress where she had knelt.

"Go back, child," she said. "They 're carrying her in."